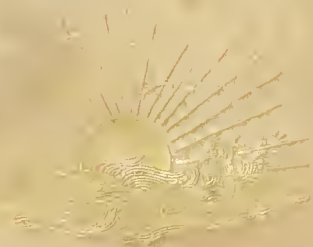


THE SIREN

HENRY CARROLL M.





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The siren.



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THE SIREN.

THE SIREN.

BY

HENRY CARRINGTON, M.A.,
DEAN OF BOCKING.



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A Metrical Version.

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The Siren,

A FAIRY TALE,

DEDICATED TO MY THREE CHILDREN,

MARY, INES, EVELYN,

FOR WHOSE AMUSEMENT IT WAS WRITTEN.

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THE SIREN

I.

THE SIREN'S HAUNT.

A SIREN sat upon a rock,
In the recesses of a bay,
Where, sheltered from the billow's shock,
Calm sleeps, or laughing ripples play.
It was a place where you would say
The pilgrim of the sea should seek,
And there be free from fear of wreck
When swept the storm across his way,
And in that harbour rest awhile,
And see unmoved the billows break
Beyond his shelter many a mile ;
His shattered vessel there refit,
And harm of time and wind repair,
Till gentle breezes warn to quit,
Though longing still to linger there.

Yet did that harbour only smile
To lure the sailor to his loss,

THE SIREN

Far safer in the deep to toil,
And in the wildest storms to toss ;
For all the bay's calm mouth across
(Which like a crescent deep and wide
With spreading arms embraced the tide)
Are pointed rocks but just beneath,
Which sudden rend the vessel's side,
And doom the wretched crew to death.

And yet more fatal than the bar,
Devouring with its hidden teeth,
More dread than storms or billows are,
Or than the levin's piercing scath ;
Worse than all elemental war
(Should any 'scape the stony harm)
Was the delusive sleepy calm
That on the bosom of the bay
Diffused in poisoned sweetness lay ;
Was the intoxicating 'balm,
That all around, above, beneath,
Through soul and senses found its way :
The music of the Siren's breath.

For all who heard her mystic song
Were captive to its fatal sway,
More sweet it fell than melody
E'er uttered by a mortal tongue ;
No reason could its charm defy.

More sweet than note of evening's bird
In silent woods beneath the stars,
When all save we are sleeping, heard ;
When nought the calm prevailing mars,
When not a sound of earth is nigh,
Save mosses rustling 'neath the feet
To make the stillness more complete ;
More sweet than ripple of the stream,
Or murmur of the summer wind ;
Than love's first whisper, soft and kind,
That ne'er shall cease to haunt the mind :
Than all the soul can think or dream,
Far sweeter was the Siren's song
As swept its fatal sounds along.

And all, whoever reached the spot,
And felt the magic of her spell,
At once in dreamy rapture fell,
And all their former life forgot :

Of all their schemes they nothing thought,
Nor why they left their home could tell,
Nor what the haven that they sought :
No love of fame their bosoms swell,
Of wealth and gain they heeded nought :
Their longing wives remembered not
Nor prattle of their children's voice :
Nor thought of safety could rejoice,
Nor any thought of death dismay :

Nor did they wish, nor had they choice
But 'neath the fatal charm to stay,
And listen time and life away.

To some the voice doth seem to flow
From out the depths beneath the wave ;
And these to listen bend them low
And lower, o'er the vessel's side ;
Until their longing heart doth crave,
Until their madness doth decide,
To seek the music in the wave ;
Then from their hold they slowly glide,
And 'neath the billows find a grave :
Nor any hand is stretched to save,
Nor any heed their fate, nor know.

'Neath others doth their bark decay,
And yet to 'scape they never think :
They see the water gain the brink,
But never fear or grief betray :
Each sitting silent in his place,
With staring eyes and haggard face,
Until the parted vessel sink.

And others wander on the beach
With listless steps, or on a stone
They musing sit,—but each alone,
And listening to the Siren's mock ;

They never think to scale the rock,
And safety from the waves to reach ;
But each delights in solitude
Wherein to soothe his dreamy mood :

No record of the days they keep,
Nor do they ever laugh or weep ;
Nor feel they any need of food,
Until they sink and fall to sleep
Beside the wave, beneath the steep,
To vanish in the rising flood.

And on the shore, and 'mid the caves
Which in the sea-worn cliffs were reft,
Was many a dismal record left.
Washed back by the returning waves,
Skulls might be seen among the stones ;
And strewed upon that dismal strand,
Of many a victim lay the bones,
Bleaching half-buried in the sand.
Sometimes the ripple to and fro
Would gently roll them to the shore,
Now dry beyond the waters throw,
Now sink them to the deep once more.

Or if some wretch had found a seat,
Where death o'ertook him on a ledge,
Above the billows' highest beat,
There, still was poised upon the edge,

And leaning 'gainst the rocky wall,
Which held it nor allowed to fall ;
 A gaunt and dismal skeleton ;
That sat unmoved in dreadful rest,
 The clasped hands resting on the knees,
The head bent down upon the breast,
As with long weariness oppress ;
 And rags, once garments, loose and torn
Like death-flags fluttered to the breeze.

Or on some shelter, flat and smooth,
 O'erhung, and shaded from the skies,
And fit the tired soul to soothe
 When burdened by its weight of woes :
Beyond the limits of the tide,
 A lone sad record pained the eyes :
 There, as it slept away to death
Reclining on its hollow side,
 The hand its sightless skull beneath,
Stretched out at length, it doth abide,
 A dreadful mockery of repose.

And scarce less grievous was the sight
 Upon the bosom of the bay,
Which never felt the wild winds' might,
 Nor surged beneath the tempest sway—
Where only, 'neath the calm blue sky,
The lulling air moved slowly by,

Where only with a sleepy swell,
The sea unbroken heaved and fell ;—
The sight of many a sunken wreck,
Of bare mast staring from the sea ;
Or of the still, untrodden deck
Where flap the torn sails lazily—
Or where, by wearing time decayed
The spars along the ship are laid,
Or fallen by the vessel's side ;
Or floated gently by the tide,
Against some other waif are pushed ;
No voice to hear, no life to view :
But every ship in silence hushed,
And every ship without a crew.

II.

THE SIREN'S SINGING.

SUCH ruin did the Siren bring
To all who, travelling o'er the main,
Were ever doomed to hear her sing,
And witchèd by hër enchanting strain,
Were doomed for ever to remain,
Nor ever seek their home again.

For once her magic reached the ear,
Though many a wave and many a mile
Divided from her fatal isle—
No hope, no chance, no succour were ;
E'en, while as yet they scarce could hear,
The strange low breath, that from afar
Now on their mazèd senses falls,
And now is hushed at intervals ;
Long ere her notes distinguished are,
A weight, a spell was on the air,
That seemed a sadness and a fear
Gently through every heart to steal,
All did a creeping languor feel ;
Strange dreamy wishes haunt the brain,
Of half-delight and half-despair,

'Gainst which to struggle was in vain.

Nor did they strive to struggle long,
But as the sound more filled their ear,
Then utterly their soul possessed,
They had no thought, no wish, no care,
But only to absorb the song,
Only pursue the fatal quest.

And first around with vacant gaze
They stare, at loss to understand
What doth their raptured heart amaze ;
And whate'er work is 'neath their hand,
They cease, and never more resume.
Their Captain, who the last resists,
Would bid the men their toil renew ;
But while on safety he insists,
Himself o'erpowered, as the crew,
The subtle poison doth pursue ;
And all his energy consume :
He only to the Siren lists,
And leaves half-uttered his command,
And sees the Pilot change the helm,
Unchecked, towards the enchanted realm.

And watched the Siren day and night,
The ruin that her music wrought ;
Watched from her lone and rocky height :—
Saw from afar the vessel caught.

Far as the eagle's stretched her sight,
O'er many a mile she could descry
 The ship, which seemed but as a speck,
Hasting in glad security,
 Bound for some rich and friendly shore,
 Or for the home it never more
 Shall see.—She watched the sudden check
Which stopped, then slowly changed its course,
 Ne'er to change more ; she saw it glide
As if impelled by hidden force
 Toward the toils that soon shall hide
 Its hopes, and joyous life, and pride,
 In dark inevitable wreck.

So moved it as a tree when thrown
 In headlong river's steep descent,
Where cataracts dash their waters down,
 And nought can stay nor fall prevent.

Or as the steel doth magnet seek,
 Or as a bird, fixed by the eye
 Of some cold snake, no more can fly,
But feels its pretty wing grow weak,
 And ever nigher and more nigh
Must draw, with short and fluttering flight ;
Till with faint chirp, a piteous sight,
Near the dread fangs it must alight :
Meanwhile, the snake all motionless,

Coiled on its treacherous fold doth lie ;
And from its clammy cold recess,
 With cruel, calm, unshrinking eye,
Doth only gaze upon its prey ;
 The certain moment can abide :
 It doth not spring, nor move, nor glide,
But only gaze ; yet gaze away
All strength and courage in dismay ;
Gaze with a look that seems to say,
I hold you in resistless sway ;
And pause or struggle as you may,
 Your will is mine ; and you must speed,
Though with a shrinking agony ;
 Yet still my thought's command must heed,
And come to death, I not conceal,
Nor you can doubt I mean to deal.

III.

THE SIREN'S BEAUTY.

NOW do you ask, what was the form,
The face, the look, of her who sat
Upon the sea-girt rocky tower ;
And by her death-melodious power,
More surely than the wave or storm
Made all around her desolate ?

Was she a monster, foul and fell ;
Or like the three, whose snaky hair
Benumbs the palsied heart with fear,
'Mid death and carnage fit to dwell ?

Was she some hag deformed, and old,
In whose repulsive looks are read
Cold cruelty, and fury dread ;
Whose savage mouth and subtle eye
Tells pity dead, bids hope to fly ;
And makes the curdled blood run cold ?

Was such the form that met the sight ?
No, she was lovely as the day ;
All the sad beauty of the night,

That sinks into the soul, and stirs
With love its inmost depths, was hers :
 Lovely as nymphs, that wont to stray
Through forest glen, or mountain height,—
 As Venus self, when from the sea
 She rose in virgin purity.
More soft her dainty skin, more white
 Than the new-fallen stainless snow ;
Than fleecy clouds in morning light ;
 Than does the maiden lily show ;
Than is the down upon the swan ;
 Than moonlight, in unruffled lake,
That seems so gently pale and wan ;
 Than aught the painter's art can make,
Or poet's fancy picture can :
All these with her in vain compare,
So smooth, so soft, so white, and fair. .

Her eyes were heaven's deepest blue,
 Shaded by lashes dark and long :
 Whence oft the trembling tear-drop hung ;
 They had a soft, sad, loving ray,
And gentle did they look and true ;
And whilst your heart their gaze sunk through,
 They seemed as clearly to display
Whate'er her bosom felt, and knew ;—
 And seemed, disclaiming guile and wrong,
For pity and for love to sue.

Upon her arched and coral lips
Persuasion dwells, and eloquence ;
And there love ever lives and sips,
And flows the lily's fragrance thence ;
And soft and sweetly full they seem,
Like pulp of ripe and rosy fruit,
As earliest girlhood best doth suit,
Visioned in poet's brightest dream :
They seemed to bud forth from her cheeks,
And grow there with a pouting grace ;
A magic charm eye vainly seeks,
Upon however fair a face
When grown to perfect womanhood :
An artless charm of youth alone,
More felt and loved than understood ;
Which time must alter and efface,
When purpose, thought, and will are shown.

And just apart they let be seen,
Like linkèd pearls in ruby set,
The snowy gems that glanced between :
They stood, those coral gates, ajar—
As from their sweet recess, to let
'Scape forth all sounds that sweetest are,
Music, and laughter, love, and smiles,
And all the heart and ear beguiles.

Nor must we leave unnamed, those locks
That in a golden wealth of curls,

In yellow showers and silken shocks,
Down her smooth neck and shoulders twine :
 And formed a radiant veil, that furls
Around, and hides her slender waist :
 And, as she pressed her rocky seat,
Like tendrils of the fragrant vine
 Flowed o'er her knees, and kissed her feet.

She seemed a statue bright and chaste,
 Where all the sculptor's art is shown ;
Of ivory, dazzling to behold ;
 Or of the stainless Parian stone,
O'er which is cast a web of gold.

The Siren was so wondrous fair,
 That not Olympus' self excels,
And scarce Olympus may compare ;
 Though there celestial beauty dwells,
Though there the winning Graces are ;
 Though Hebe there the nectar pour ;
 There Dian rest, her hunting o'er ;
And e'en the matchless three be there,
 Who erst for beauty's prize did vie,
 Before the lovely Phrygian boy :

Her beauty sank into the heart,
 And stole the heart away, it left,
Once seen, instead, ne'er to depart,

A hunger, thirst, a longing void,
A craving never satisfied :
The captive soul, by love subdued,
Of all resistance was bereft ;
And thus, the charms her singing wrought
Were by her loveliness renewed ;
Which, though but for a moment viewed,
Was ever loved, and ever sought.

IV.

THE SIREN'S FATE.

CAN, then, such loveliness as hers,
Can such a face and form contain
A loveless soul, a heart of stone,
Which mocks and laughs at grief and pain ?
Which with no tender passion stirs,
And sighs, and tears, has never known,
For any sorrows save her own ?

Can the fair Siren so belie
All promise that in beauty lives ?
All signs, all pledges Nature gives ?
All proof she shows in face, and eye,
Look and expression ? which declare
Her heart and soul all gentle are ;
All full of love, and sympathy.
Can she look thus, yet find a joy
In all the fatal misery
Caused by her song's delusive charm ?
Can she delight the wrecks to scan,
And wasted limbs, and faces wan,
And all the shapes of loss and harm,
And death, that round her rocky nest,
On beach and bay, in ruin rest ?

Not so ! That form no fraud we find,
No veil by Nature's freak designed
To hide the foul reality ;
The monster ill, that lurks behind !
Her face did not her heart belie ;
But 'twas an index of the mind ;
Where all its secrets you may know ;
Or 'twas a mirror framed to show
The charms, that in her spirit lie.
For soft as are her lips and cheek
And clear and true as shines her eye ;
No less her heart was soft and meek :
No less does guile and fraud deny.
And white and stainless as her skin,
The tenant was as fair within.

All undesigned, all 'gainst her will,
The wrecks, the suffering, and the wrong
Wrought by her compulsory song ;
Which does the hest of Jove fulfil.
Far rather would she bear the ill
She causes, helpless to refrain,
Far, rather, sink the wrecked among,
Than cause the doom, she hates, in vain.

She, but the passive instrument,
The slave, that doth his lord's command.
The sword within the tyrant's hand :

Or spear hurled by the warrior's might :
 The guiltless slaughterer of the slain.
Or like a bow by giant bent,
Guiltless the aim, and fell intent,
 Guiltless the death and poisoned pain,
Caused by the arrow's feathered flight.

So she, by hard resistless fate
 Once, during each returning day,
And once on each successive night,
 Was forced to sing her magic lay
 Upon the rock above the bay.

Such doom, as legends old relate,
Did follow from the Muses' hate ;
Who for their tuneful honours feared,
 And prayed to Jove, that death to all
 Who heard the Siren might befall :
Because from many a tongue they heard
Her music, to their own preferred.

Thus some. But other stories tell
 That not the Muses' jealousy
Was truly cause of what befell :
 But he who owns the silver bow,
And he who strikes the golden lyre,
 Phœbus, became the Sirens' foe,
And cursed their song with fatal spell ;

Because of old they dared aspire
With him, the king of song, to vie,
And claimed the crown of minstrelsy.

But whatsoe'er the truth may be,
Or whatsoe'er th' imputed crime
Which kindled the celestial ire ;
Or who the vengeful deity,
Now darkened by the veil of time—
'Tis vain to ask : but this alone,
Free from all doubt, is surely known,
That once by night, and once by day,
The Siren is compelled to sing :
A captive longing to be free.
And, that her song must ruin be,
Must certain death and shipwreck bring,
To all, who travelling o'er the sea
Hear the least echo of her lay,
Or vision of her beauty see,
Or sail beside the fatal bay.

Therefore, with ever-growing grief,
With heavy sighs, and bitter tears,
And dark remorse, and chilling fears,
Upon her rock disconsolate,
She sits, and supplicates relief,
And wearies Jove with idle prayers

To free her from the doom she bears,
And change the fixed decrees of fate.

Father of gods and men ! she cries,
O do not ever stop thy ears ;
O do not ever close thine eyes ;
But heed my plaint, and see my wrong ;
Let woe like mine, so deep, so long,
Suffice at length to expiate
The crime of heedless rivalries,
Imputed by celestial hate.

O take the curse from off my song !
O take the poison from my voice !
Nor make me longer perpetrate
These deeds of death, against my choice.

All creatures else that Thou hast made,
And gods above, and men below,
And fauns and nymphs on hill and glade,
And birds that haunt the forest shade :
And e'en the beasts, that nightly prowl,
And seek their prey with savage howl ;
Do in their native speech rejoice—
But I, unhappy and forlorn,
By unremitting anguish torn,
I, upon whom Thou didst bestow
The gift of matchless melody :—

Am doomed to shudder at the sound
That from my lips is forced away ;
And, powerless my song to stay,
 Feel every note a piercing wound.

Or on my lips bid silence reign,
 And power of song be all resigned :
 (Henceforth but anguish to my mind,
While memory of the past remains).

But O ! the choicest boon would be
 To let me lay the burden down
Of thankless immortality—
 To let me change the goddess' crown,
 For the fast fleeting envied span,
 All thou dost lay on happier man.

For weary of the light am I,
 Nor longer wish accursed to live,
Sport of remorseless destiny ;
 And O ! how gladly would I give
My days and nights of fear, to save
Those, who beneath the treacherous wave,
My cruel hateful songs destroy.

Yes, there is now no dream of joy,
 No solace for my grief-worn heart,
 Save from the hated day to part :
The watery waste no more to see,

The dismal waste, that to my brain,
The blood of victims seems to stain.
Never again to hear the plash
Of ocean, on the pebbles dash ;
Nor evermore to hear the gale,
That with death sighings seems to wail ;
But ever hide from ear and eye,
All sights and sounds of misery.

Thus day and night her vows assail
Olympus' height, but all in vain :
Nought do her ceaseless prayers avail,
Not yet the fated hour is come,
When shall her sighs and tears prevail,
Which shall reverse her weary doom ;
When Jove's decree shall take again
The gift of immortality
She feels but as a heavy chain,
That doth to ceaseless anguish tie :

When she at last may sink to rest,
All pains and wrongs and woes forgot,
Upon the earth, her mother's breast,
Or in the ocean's stilly deep,
Where motion, sound, and sight are not,
Find that unbroken stilly sleep,
The happy envied mortal lot,
The only boon she asks ;—to die.

Or if (opposed to destiny)—

Of endless life the fatal boon,

When once 'tis by the gods conferred,

Can never be again laid down,

How loathed soe'er a burden grown,

But must for ever be endured :

If this last solace may not be,

This final close, this end assured,

Of all by sorrow borne and feared,

The lesser boon doth still remain,

Which pitying fate may have in store :

That of her sweet destructive strain

(The spell dissolved) should nought remain

Save its surpassing melody ;

Which then should fill the ravished ear

With peace and laughter, love and joy,

Nor cause a pang nor force a tear.

For she had learned from ancient lore,

And promise wrapt in mystery,

A time should come, long ages o'er,

Which from her doom should set her free.

For this with hungry hope she stays,

For this she weeps, for this she prays ;

Longs that each day may be the last

In her unwelcome thralldom past ;

And hopes that each succeeding night

May never lead her back to light :

This most she hopes, yet well content
Whate'er the change by heaven sent ;
Nor reck's whiche'er alternative
The long-delayed release shall give ;
Or be it death, or further days,
But days unburdened by remorse ;
If lose her song its baneful force,
Or all her tuneful powers cease,
She cares not, so it bring release.

V.

THE SIREN'S GRIEF.

BUT none may hasten fate's delay ;
And tell the sure predestined hour ;
Her prayers unheeded pass away.—

And still, upon her rocky tower
She day and night must sit and sing,
With grief her tortured heart devour ;
And death and wreck around her fling.

Nay, e'en the tears that dew her cheeks,
The weight of pitying grief that lies
Unfathomed in her azure eyes ;
The anguish in her voice that speaks ;
Does but join fetters to her chain,
Does but a deeper pathos add,
To sounds that make the hearers mad :
And tighter in her thrall retain.

And ever does the Siren try
To warn the sailors from the shore,
Tells them of all the treachery :
And bids them fly ere hope be o'er,
Or else her own sad history
So strange and cruel doth deplore.

Her wish to succour is in vain :
The words of warning all are lost
Upon the winds and water tost ;
Melodious sounds alone remain,
Whose guile shall many a vessel cost.

How is her ever-listening ear
Kept on the stretch, by constant fear :
How does each sighing of the wind,
Each rustle of a falling leaf,
Cause her to spring with sudden start
And quickened palpitating heart,
Lest any sail her search should find,
Far off or nearing to the reef.

How does she dread her eyes to stretch
Beyond the bay, across the sea,
Lest some devoted ship there be
Which can her fatal music reach :
And oft she turns her face away,
Or in her tightened palms doth hide,
Or keeps her eyes within the bay,
Nor dares beyond its limits stray ;
Because she trembles to abide
What sight may wider range betray,
What may before her eyes betide.

Yet as who fears a phantom dread
If he should ope his eyes to see ;

And thinks to hear its measured tread
Follow his own, unceasingly ;
Who feels, that to his shoulder near
And whispering in his awe-struck ear
Would horrid skull or ghost appear,
Yet is at last compelled to gaze
Although the sight should kill or craze ;

So she at last may not resist,
But though with terror, must explore
(Since greater terror doth insist)
The whole expanse from shore to shore ;
Must scan the waste from side to side,
To where the far horizon fails ;
And O ! what agony she feels,
How all her sickened spirit quails,
If fearful scrutiny reveals
A ship upon the waters wide.

Nor less delight the Siren knows
(If we delight may justly call
The mere cessation of her woes,
The fleeting rest from dreary thrall),
Still, nearest happiness she feels,
Still gains a momentary peace,
From instant fear a short release,
A pause, a rest from sorrow steals,
Whene'er her fated watch has past

The house of torture night and day :
Whenever this has past away
Nor ship within her ken be cast.

Then doth she to her cavern flee,
Her crystal cave beside the sea ;
And there find solace for a while,
And hope that by the god's decree
Before another morning smile
(Smile on the happy and the free,
But only rise on her to frown,
Crushed to the dust by sorrow down)
Her dreary doom may ended be.

VI.

HER FORMER SELF.

THUS tender and compassionate
Is now the Siren's gentle breast.
Nor any joy, nor peace, nor rest,
She knows, but early grieves and late :
And in her inmost heart she bleeds ;
Through all her soul's recesses feels,
The ruin, that she guiltless deals ;
The wrong 'gainst which to Jove she pleads
And yet not always had she felt
The life she leads by cruel fate,
A dark and agonizing weight.—
Not always did her bosom melt
For other's woes—a time had been
(When with her sisters twain she dwelt),
Sight now so piteous she had seen,
Like them, without a thought or pang.

For when at first, by rival spleen
The curse was fixed on all they sang,
That none, within whose senses rang
Their voice, should pass them scathless by,
But shipwrecked be, or pine and die ;

Then, whether 'twere in mercy meant,
Because to know, to feel, to rue,
All wrongs they were compelled to do ;
Had been more dread a punishment,
Than could the fiercest vengeance pour ;—
Or if 'twere cruel sport and scorn,
And meant the tarnished soul to lower ;
Yet so it was, that from the hour
When first their penalty was borne,
Their nature changed ; a heart was given
Whence all compassion was bereft ;
All power of gentle tears was riven,
And not e'en memory was left,
Of how a moment's space ago,
They felt at sight of pain and woe.

Sudden, their heart became a stone ;
Nor human nor divine ; and they
Conscience of cruelty have none,
Nor of the wrong they do their prey :
More than the vulture, when the dove
Pants in its talons sharp and strong ;
Or famished lions when they rove
The dappled forest herds among ;
Or than the shark with ravenous teeth,
That follows in the vessel's wake,
Feels for the prey it drags beneath

The wave ; or than the painted snake
That glides within the mossy brake.

Thus were they changed upon the day
When first their song was deadly made ;
Their former self quite snatched away,
And frozen was their heart or dead.

And she, the subject of our lay,
No less the fatal change displayed
Than did her sisters.—She as they
Deprived of pity, love, and thought
(As though to them it mattered nought),
Beheld, unheeded and unfelt,

The thousand shapes of misery,
Their now enchanted music dealt.

They saw the doomed around them lie,
They saw their victims droop and die ;
And all the sorrow that they wrought,
Without a pang, without a sigh.

VII.

HER FORMER HOME.

THEY lived together in an isle,
A solitary isle, that stood
Far off amid the ocean flood ;
And many a long and dreary mile
Divided from the nearest land.

Such size it was, a runner might
(One who was practised, young and light,
Who at some Patriot Chief's command
Brings tidings of impending fight)
Bound o'er the whole encircling strand,
Within a single day and night.

This island, passing fair and bright,
Basked in the sun's unceasing smile ;
All gifts for profit and delight
Did nature in its limits pile ;
Sweet thymy slopes, the haunt of flocks,
Deep meadows for the lowing herd,
And olive groves, and vine-clad rocks,
And woods where sings each sweetest bird ;

And fruits in luscious plenty grew,
To tempt the eye, and please the taste ;
And flowers of every dainty hue,
On every breeze their fragrance cast ;
And rills like flowing crystal haste
O'er pebbly falls, or gently thread
Their winding path, through grove and mead
With sound of freshness ever new,
Until they reach the sea at last.

In shape three sides the island showed,
Like to the famed Trinacrian land ;
Save here each side like crescent bowed ;—
Each crescent's horns on either side
The others meeting ; thus were seen
Three promontories, toward the tide,
To jut, like arms extending wide ;
And these three hollow bays between ;

The crescent horns at ocean's flow
Were partly buried by the wave :
But footway when the tide was low
Of shingle at their bases have :
Each horn a cliff of beetling height,
On each, some forty feet above,
Where breaks the sea's most threatening might ;
Was hewn or worn a deep alcove,
A tower of watch, or rocky throne ;

And for the hour of night and day,
Appointed by decree of Jove,
Each Sister Siren sat thereon
And sang her sweet delusive lay.

But 'twixt the jutting horns, each bay
Sloped gently downward to the sea ;
And yellow belt of sparkling sand,
Stretched 'twixt the ocean and the land ;
Each bay a nook, where ships may find
Safe anchorage from storms and wind ;
And shelter and security.

And as it met the seaman's sight,
Who on his solitary way
Across the weary trackless plain,
For many a week, had nothing seen,
But ocean's rolling waste of green ;
And yearns for sight of land again ;
It seemed so kindly to invite,
That none could grudge a short delay,
To furl the sails, and rest awhile,
From strain of oar, and watch and toil ;
To plenish all their failing store,
With oil and wine their casks to fill,
And draw sweet water from the rill,
And bask upon the sunny shore.—

Which none who touched it ever left !
Of reason and of life bereft !

And from her place of scrutiny,
Each Siren kept her tuneful watch ;
And right and left, and far away,
Gazed with keen eyes, and glimpse to catch
Of far-off sails, her destined prey,
And smiled the fated ship to see.

VIII.

THE SIRENS' RECREATIONS.

AND when the appointed hour was o'er,
Then would they leave their rocky seat,
And in some pleasant valley meet,
Or roam together by the shore :
Their arms twined round each slender waist,
Or on each other's shoulders pressed,
So lovely that they well might be
Jove's daughters fair, the Graces three.

And oft together lift their voice
In sweet harmonious symphony,
That made the earth, and air, and sky,
Woods, streams, and Nature's self rejoice.

Or else, as fancy led, resort
To their palatial cavern wide,
By Nature's hand a marvel wrought,
Or hollowed by primeval tide :
Far in the tall cliff's granite side ;
Whose roofs of vaulted crystal show
All colours of the painted bow.
And like the courts by Vulcan made
For the celestial gods, the floor }

With dazzling gems and glittering ore
Was all in flowery wreaths inlaid.

And there they many a spoil conveyed,
From ships that did their voices wreck ;
And roof, and sides, and floor they deck ;
Silver and gold and gems of price,
And Indian silk, and rich attire ;
And vessels carved with rare device,
Rich arms, that warlike youths admire ;
Treasures, and hoarded wealth, that late
Formed the wrecked vessel's costly freight ;
Now cast on shore by every wave,
They heaped to deck their crystal cave.

There passed they many a joyous hour,
There would relate, without regret,
What various fortune each had met,
What strains had most prevailing power ;
How sometimes would their art prevail,
And ships within their trammel sail ;
Or how from those whom mighty Jove
Watched over with protecting love,
The wild wind wafted far away
Their sweetest, most prevailing lay.

IX.

THEIR SEA RACES.

OR else, for such the power given
By Neptune to the Sisters three,
Unharm'd and fearless were they driven
Upon the surface of the sea.

And dolphins for their steeds they had,
Harnessed to chariots rich and rare :
Some like to mimic vessels made,
And some in glittering sheen displayed,
Like pearly Nautilus appear.

And in each car was set a throne ;
Soft skins of seals were set above,
With coral decked, and precious stone ;
Where each fair Siren sat and drove.

No land-born horse, of swiftest breed,
With their sea coursers may compare ;
Of mighty strength, and matchless speed,
As o'er the billows they career.

Or, when the watery plain was seen,
All calm and even, smooth and clear,
Without a ripple or a break,

Or wavy swell or foamy track,
Like the far-stretching prairie green,
The desert courser's windy home,
And where wild herds at pleasure roam ;—

Then did the Siren chariots glide,
The ocean steeds their charges bear ;
Swift as the petrel skims the tide,
Or swallow cleaves the liquid air.

Thus many a mile far out to sea
The Sisters would together race ;
Or in their joyous sport and glee,
Pursued and fled in frolic chase,
Nor could a lovelier vision be
Than they presented to the view,
When in their ocean-chariot match,
They now apart, now nearer drew,
Now seemed to 'scape, and now to catch.

And now awhile their steeds to ease,
Each by the other held her place,
With sparkling eyes, and rosy face,
And tresses floating to the breeze.

And sweet to hear the merry shout,
While yet the game was at its height,
That from their coral lips burst out,

And filled the air with glad delight :
To hear them cheer their ocean team,
While they lean forward o'er their seat,
Or glance behind with feigned alarms,
Or stand with outstretched snowy arms,
And shake the reins, and eager seem
Their sister Sirens twain to beat.

No fairer sight has earth e'er shown,
Nor fairer sight could heaven lend,
No gladder sound, no brighter charms,
If e'en Olympus self should send
Each loveliest goddess to contend,
Which fleetest round the course could bend,
And victor's laurel garland own.

And when the Sirens for a space
Ceased from their breathless ardent race,
And while their dolphins on the tide,
And chariots floated side by side ;
And when their pulse more gently flowed,
And their white bosoms panted less,
With rapid flight and eagerness,
And their soft cheeks more faintly glowed,

Then might be heard the happy peal,
Of silver-sounding laughter steal,
Far over ocean's glassy plain ;

And O how sweet the music sent
By their melodious merriment,
Which echo loves to give again.

And then they talked their contest o'er,
And each extols her rapid steeds—
The victor makes her triumph more,
And this or that the conquered pleads ;
Their voices ever and again,
Joining, as changeful fancy leads,
In some sweet, melancholy strain.

Then ranged in line, with eager hand,
Once more they clutch the tightened rein,
And start at signal of command,
And skim along the glassy main,
And race together to the land.

X.

THEIR PRIVILEGES GIVEN BY NEPTUNE

NOR only was the gift conferred
To travel scathless on the sea ;
In pearly chariot safe and free,
And drawn by Proteus' briny herd.—
Or, should it thus their fancy please,
Seated upon the monster's back,
Like gallant vessel on its track,
To stem the tide with fearless ease :

Showing such contrast to the eye,
As if by sculptor's mastery,
Upon a steed of marble black,
Were carved a nymph of ivory.

Or as at other times they may
Trip o'er the main with airy tread,
And feet more white than is the spray ;
Or lie reclined as on a bed.

Nor these alone the powers assigned
By Him, who rules the waves and wind ;
Neptune the Ocean King. But they,
As all the attendant trains, that swell

His pageant, and behests obey,
Tritons and nymphs, and all that dwell
Far in his watery realm away,
Like power and like permission share,
And in the ocean depths can stray,
Secure as in earth's upper air.

XI.

NATURE BENEATH THE SEA.

SUCH then the joyous liberty
By Neptune placed at their command.
And often would the Sirens three,
When summer days all sultry be,
To the cool depths beneath the sea,
Descend, and wander hand in hand.

Wonders and marvels, strange and new,
Diverse from aught that knows the land,
Meet their amazed, delighted view,
Above, below, on every side
Of the vast realm they travel through,
That sways the monarch of the tide.

There ocean meadows far extend,
In softer, brighter verdure clad
Than earthly pasture ever had,—
Where Proteus' herds at pleasure wend.
Vast sable forms, of mighty bulk,
Lay on the verdant flats, or slept,

And seemed like sunken vessel's hulk.—
And myriad-leggèd creatures crept

Among the grasses long and thick ;
And serpent forms were seen to glide,
With crested head and painted pride,
In undulation smooth and quick.

And other regions gave to view
Vast forests, spreading far and wide—
No trees, in upper air that grew
(Though trebled in their lofty pride)
With those sea forests can compare.

And like enormous cables made,
Their giant bodies pliant were ;
And to and fro elastic swayed,
And all around their branches spread,
With broad and streaming flags for leaves.

Or to their wonder was displayed,
How coral rock or mountain heaves
From deep abyss its lofty head
Beyond the surface of the tide ;
Till warmed to life by Phœbus' smile,
It forms a habitable isle.

And seen in rock or mountain side,
Grotto and cave and palace rare ;
That stretched and winded many a mile,
With thousand chambers passing fair,
Which many an armed host might hide.

And there do myriad shapes abide,
Creatures for whom no name is found,
Nor aught is like that haunts the ground :
Some pleasing to the sight appear,
And monstrous some, and full of fear,
But all prodigious, strange and rare.

But for the dwelling and behoof
Of nymphs, and watery deities,
And all the people of the seas ;
Besides, and fairer far than these,
Were arbours formed of coral trees,
With laced and polished crimson roof.
And many a dim mysterious grot,
And many a carved and pillared hall ;
And secret nook and bowery spot,
That loveliest scenes of earth recall.

Vast palaces with many a dome,
And fairy pinnacle and spire ;
That wind and taper lighter, higher,
Than aught e'er built by mortal hand ;
Groined galleries stretched from room to room,
And towers that vast and solid stand :

And every dwelling, great or small,
Whether for state or pleasure made,
Was rich with costliest mineral ;

There silver, gold, and pearl and jet,
And gems of every colour met,
Crystal, and marble green and red,
Azure and yellow, black and white ;
All that can give the eye delight.

And here no monster dare intrude,
No creature that offends the eye ;
Or that can harm or terror cause —
All at the crystal threshold pause,
With dread and reverent awe imbued ;
And pass the walls submissive by ;
Or else the Tritons' hests obey,
And for their pleasure sport and play.

At times the Sirens, hand in hand,
Strayed where vast plains of yellow sand
Stretch all around for many a mile ;
Level as surface of a lake,
Or Ocean when it sees its king
From deep recesses rise and smile,
And o'er it calm and pleasure fling.
And these no rocks or ridges break,
But of all gems a sparkling store,
And shells as beauteous, strew the floor.

These and a thousand other scenes,
And jewel mines, and glittering hoard,

Which ocean's veil from mortal screens,
Did Neptune's nether realms afford :
And there, as choice or chance constrain,
Whether to stately palace court,
Or cave, or bower, or coral grove,
Forest, or orchard, hill, or plain,
The lovely Sirens would resort,
And in the sultry summer rove.

XII.

SEA CREATURES.

SOMETIMES alone they strayed along,
Or it at other times befell
They mingled with the kindred throng
That in the realms of Ocean dwell :
Tritons, and nymphs, and all who wait
Upon the mighty sea King's state.

With these would dance upon the sand,
In mazy windings hand in hand.

At other times, the Ocean band,
Would place the Siren Sisters on
Some soft and green and mossy throne :
Whose snowy forms, with verdure met,
Seemed like to pearls on emerald set ;
While they themselves would stand around
Or on the sands in circle lie,
And listen raptured to the sound
Of their enchanting melody ;
To them delight and love and joy,
Without a thought of peril joined,
And only fatal to mankind.

Then would they for their guerdon show
 (Thus hoping still to hear the voice
 Which none can hear and not rejoice)
The secrets of the realms below.

And as the Sirens to and fro
 Upon their ocean travel sped ;
And now explored the lowest main,
Now to the surface rose again ;
 They all their course accompanied,
Taught them to know each finny brood,
 And things of strange abnormal shape,
Victims, and tyrants of the flood,
 Pursuing some, while some escape.

Now vasty whales their backs would lend
 As islands for their feet to tread ;
 Now hideous sharks, that terror spread,
Round them in darting circles wend,
 And fang-forked grave-like jaws displayed ;
Yet Neptune's train, exempt from harm,
 None could or injure or alarm.

Creatures they saw, with beast-like head,
 Wolves, lions, joined to fish's tail ;
 Some armed with horn, some clad in mail,
And here a fin-legged crocodile :
 But ten times larger than the Nile
E'er in its oozy sedges bred.

Some like great swimming jaws appear,
A head that trunk nor body shows ;
Some like enormous globes, that rear
Long pointed spikes in endless rows.

And some display a central beak,
Most like a vulture, sharp and strong ;
Round which four glaring eyeballs seek
Their victims as they glide along :
Enclosed are these by arms a score,
Long, clammy, flexible, like cords,
With venom'd hooks all covered o'er
(Most loathsome this of ocean's hordes).
These arms the monster could draw in
Close to its beak, and then with strength
And lightning speed, for yards in length
Dart out, its destined prey to win ;
And nought that met its fatal touch
Could e'er be severed from its clutch.

And when its hideous arms it spreads,
A living spider-net 'twas like,
Save that it lacked the transverse threads.—
The central beak prepared to strike,
The spider couched doth represent,
'Midst of his net on spoil intent.

Hideous were these, yet since secure,
Their sight the Sisters might endure,

Strange as 'twas frightful. Nor alone
(By their companion guides were shown)
Such shapes of terror ; forms as fair
They marked, as these repulsive were.

But it were endless to relate
A millionth part of all the store
Of marvels which their eyes explore ;
Such wonders doth the sea create.

Yet there is one must not be passed
'Mid lesser sights in silence o'er ;
The ocean serpent strange and vast,
In length a thousand yards and more ;
With glaring eyes and crested head,
And flowing mane ; that fleetest sped,
Of all that boundless ocean bore.

XIII.

OLYMPIAN CONCLAVE.

AND thus the Siren Sisters spent
Their lives, in merry cheer and joy ;
Hardened by fate's arbitrement
'Gainst conscience of the misery
By their delusive voices sent
To all who heard and passed them by.

She too was joyous and content
Whose story do these lines contain ;
No less than were her Sisters twain,
The many years she with them dwelt
Upon their lone sequestered isle.
Nor any pang of sorrow felt,
Nor had a thought of wrong or guile,
Till on a day adventure strange
O'er all her spirit wrought a change.

And thus it happened.—On that day
Which did the Siren's future sway
(So legendary tales relate),
The gods were called by mighty Jove,
To high Olympus courts above,
A solemn feast to celebrate :

But when the ambrosial feast was o'er
 (Such food as gods immortal eat),
 Then Ganymede the lovely boy
 (By herald eagle snatched from Troy),
And Hebe loveliest maiden, pour
 Goblets of nectar rich and sweet,
And to the heavenly guests they bore,
 Each throned upon a golden seat,
Around the sire of gods and men.

The mighty Thunderer ordered then,
 That sun-bright Phœbus strike the lyre ;
And that his tuneful handmaids nine,
 Who form the sweet celestial choir,
Should to his harp their voices join,
To make the banquet all divine ;
For lost its honour, grace and zest,
 And vainly e'en by gods were quaffed
 In crystal bowls the nectar draught,
If music do not crown the feast.

Then Phœbus harped, the Muses sang,
And raptured all Olympus rang
 With glad applause, and with a smile
The King eternal gracious said
 To the wing-footed messenger,
 His faithful herald, sitting near :
 Say, Hermes, thou who many a mile

Hast through the farthest limits sped,
Of earth and heaven at my command ;
Didst thou e'er hear on sea or land,
Or in the air, or in the sky,
Such heart-delighting melody ?

Then answered Hermes—Mighty Sire,
Whose hests none dare to disobey,
In truth sweet sounds Apollo's lyre,
And sweet the Muses' tuneful lay ;
And e'en the gods may well delight,
Reclining in celestial bowers,
To listen all the live-long hours
From dewy morn to starry night.

But since you bid me truly say
If ever music met my ear
That with the heavenly choir may
In soft bewitching charm compare ;
Then listen while I soothly tell
The wondrous chance that late befell.

As to perform my Sire's behest
From heaven's gates I sped my flight,
By land and lake, by day and night,
Far seaward to the utmost west,
My journey lay across an isle ;
And there I heard a maiden sing

(Nay, golden Venus, never smile,
No lover's tale to Jove I bring),—

I say that as across I flew,
Nor meant delay nor thought to rest
(For no forgetful herald I
Of him who rules the earth and sky),
Her music seemed to thrill me through ;
A languor all my limbs oppressed,
My longing, raptured heart confessed
A dreamy joy I never knew :
I felt compelled my wings to close,
And for a moment seek repose ;
To draw the maiden minstrel nigh,
And hear her wondrous melody.

But heavenly nature may not be
Long time submitted to control
Of beings of a less degree ;
And soon, from her sweet trammels free,
I repossessed my steadfast soul ;
Yet ere my flight I re-essay'd,
I drew the wondrous minstrel near :
And then I marked a beauteous maid
In brightest bloom of youthful cheer,
Enthroned upon a jutting rock
That stretched to meet the ocean's shock.

She poured a voice so sweet and clear,
It held in thrall the raptured ear ;
And did a spell, a power possess
 Heart feels, but tongue can ne'er express ;
So that e'en now the sounds pursue
My senses, and their charm renew.

Then since her song such praise compels,
Since such mysterious power dwells
Within her voice, as never yet,
Nor e'en to-day, my ear has met ;
Though Phœbus' self inform the string,
And 'tis the tuneful Nine that sing ;
Needs must I deem her art excels

 All song, all melody beside.
But if my Sire the Lord Supreme
Of heaven and earth my sentence deem,
Or partial, or a baseless dream ;
Then let him summon to appear
The minstrel maid, that all may hear ;
 Or let him cross the ocean wide
To her far solitary isle,
There rest and listen for a while,
 And for himself the strife decide.

Replied the Thunderer—Well I wis
 Who 'twas our Herald did beguile :
One of the Siren Sisters this,

Whom I condemned their home to have
In the far-distant western wave.

Nor hither must she summoned be,
For her eventful destiny

Has many a wondrous change in store,
Disclosed alone to fate and me.

Nor must I yet discover more,
E'en to the queen who sits beside
My throne, Jove's sister and his bride.

Meanwhile, perchance I thither go,
Or not perchance, let none aspire
My thoughts to scan, or acts inquire,
Or more than I reveal, to know.

But thou, my messenger, with speed

Again thy wingèd sandals don,
And Circe find, and bid her heed

To warn Laertes' mighty son,
How he, and all his company,
Can safely pass the Sirens by ;

For only he of mortals may
Their fatal melody defy.

He said—Nor did the God delay
Upon his Sire's quest to fly.

XIV.

JOVE VISITS THE SIREN.

BUT mighty Jove, the banquet o'er,
Soon as approached the sacred night,
More swift than speed the rays of light,
Had reached the Siren's distant shore ;
Such the dread king's unbounded might.

In shipwrecked mariner's disguise,
Hard by the rock that overhung
The billows, where she sat and sung,
He stood before the Siren's eyes ;
And all the hour, by fate assigned,
When must her witching melodies
O'er echoing ocean fall and rise,
He stood, or paced the beach along,
Or on the yellow sand reclined,
And listened to the Siren's song.

Long time, with beating heart amazed,
And doubting eyes that eager wait,
Upon the stranger youth she gazed ;
Expecting in his phrenzied gait,
And in his love-struck raptured face,
The power of her charms to trace.

But when she saw the stranger still
 Sit calm, uninjured, and secure,
 And all her beauty's spell endure,
As erst her song's bewitching skill:
 Wonder and doubt and sudden fear,
Till then unknown, her bosom fill ;
 Nor will she come the stranger near :
But paused beside her seat to see,
What might this strange adventure be,
 And half she thought, but was not sure
(For such the mighty monarch's will)
No mortal but a god was he,
Whose steadfast looks such awe instil.

But he with stately steps approached,
 And royal mien, and thus addressed—
Maiden, forgive that I encroached
 Upon thy solitary rest ;
From me no force, no treason, dread ;
 A shipwrecked mariner am I,
Whom fate has forced thine isle to tread,
 Alone escaped from injury,
My bark and comrades lost and dead.

But all ungrieved my piteous lot,
 And friends and ship and wealth forgot,
Whilst listening to thy minstrelsy.

And now, I pray thee, tuneful maid,
Resume thy rocky seat once more,
Or on the beach recline thee nigh,
And from thy lips persuasive, pour
Those sounds melodious once again,
That thrill the heart and haunt the brain ;
For never yet did voice so sweet
From mortal lips my senses greet.

Nor can I think that Jove's own court,
Though golden Phœbus there resort,
Though there the heavenly Muses are,
With thy soft music can compare.

As thus he spake, a radiance shone
Around him, and in part revealed
His glory, still in part concealed ;
And lo, his sordid garment gone,
A robe where gold and purple meet,
Flowed down in many an ample fold
From shoulder to his sandled feet,
And thus some heavenly presence told.

To whom the Siren thus replied ;
Nor longer dared his radiant face
Encounter, but with modest grace
Her looks upon the ground were tied.—
O heavenly.guest ! for nothing less

Thy flowing robe and mien divine,
And sudden radiant change, confess.

Whether the awful name be thine,
Of Neptune, azure king ; or thou
Be 'mongst his loved attendant horde ;
Or sun-bright Phoebus, matchless lord
Of golden harp and silver bow :
Who askest but in scorn to hear
Lays all unequal to thine own ;

Or wingèd Hermes, herald god
Who wieldst the sleep-compelling rod ;
Some mandate of the gods to bear,
Now speedest from Olympus' throne ;

Or e'en perchance almighty Jove,
Monarch of all beneath, above ;
Whoe'er thou art, propitious be,
And listen to thy suppliant's plea.

The hour ordained by Jove or fate
For my appointed task is o'er ;
And now my Sisters twain await
My lingering steps, beside the shore,
Where we together planned to meet,
And on the waves, and 'neath the deep,
To course in ocean chariots fleet,
Till morning light from heaven peep.

E'en now they blame me for delay,
Or fear some evil chance or wrong ;
For long the hour has passed away
Which sees us close our nightly song.
Too much already have I stayed,
In wonder watching from my tower
(Ere thy true nature was displayed)
Who was it braved my wonted power.

Since then, by fate and Jove's decree,
Our task performed, our choice is free,
To roam together as we list,
Unblamed ; from thy request desist.

But this besides—I fear to bring
Dread curses on my guiltless life,
If to immortal gods I sing,
Or seem to dare presumptuous strife.
Oft does their jealous anger light
On whomsoever madly try
With their celestial gifts to vie ;
And who may stand their vengeful might ?

Fear nothing, did the god reply ;
Not e'en the gods shall dare offend,
Nor harm nor vengeance shall attend,
But sure reward if thou comply.

Then said the Siren—Soothly swear
By that dread oath the gods respect,
Me thou wilt safe and scathless bear,
And from all jealous wrath protect.

And pledge again the solemn oath,
To grant the boon I shall require.

The King replied—I grant them both,
Unless the guerdon thou desire
Is barred by changeless destiny.
Of this at least, fair maid, be sure,
That thou uninjured and secure
From jealous hate shalt ever be :
And granted, too, however vast,
The boon on which thy heart is set,
If heavenly might in ages past
The like has ever granted yet.

Thus spake the god, for well he knew
Within his all-discerning mind
(Which could the farthest future view
As clearly as in thought renew
The past, or instant present find)
What was the gift the maid designed ;
And had, his deep resolves to speed,
To grant it in his mind decreed.

XV.

THE SIREN'S REQUEST.

THUS then he said, and as he spoke,
The King his locks ambrosial shook,
And all around his presence broke

A dazzling splendour none could brook :
The rock, the mountain, plain, and wood,
The solid earth, the shore, the flood,
Trembled as bent his awful nod :

And at his feet the Siren fell,

And wept, and clasped his knees, for well
She then perceived no lesser god
But Jove himself before her stood.

The dreaded lord of gods and men

Then gently raised, and bade her name

The boon, nor peril fear nor blame.

And, reassured, the Siren then

Did thus her cherished wish proclaim :

O King supreme, the first, the last,

Who hast made all, o'er all dost reign,

To whom the future, present, past,

Alike are unconcealed and plain ;

'Gainst whom the thoughts are closed in vain,
To whom the heart's deep springs are shown ;
And soon as formed, all wishes known,
While thou thyself dost hid remain ;

My quest to learn full well I wot,
Already seen, thou needest not ;
Yet at thy summons I disclose
Both what my wish and how it rose.

As lately (when the noontide heat
Had seen our fated task fulfilled,
And all our tuneful voices stilled)
In cars impelled by coursers fleet,
I and my Sister Sirens twain
O'er ocean's glassy desert sped,
By joyous crowds accompanied,
Of those who swell thy brother's train,
Tritons and nymphs, and all the forms
That in the dark abysses dwell ;
And through his empire calm or storms
As bids their monarch raise or quell ;

I marked that one who by me rode,
And all the wondrous sights that crowd
The secret realm of ocean showed ;—

Where'er with clamour shrill and loud,
The wide-winged sea-birds round us wheeled,

Or on the waves beside us float ;—
Seemed all their varied cries to note,
And thoughts to con, that lie concealed.

At last it chanced, a bird more near
Flew round me with repeated cry ;
And he, the Triton, bent his ear,
And stared amazed as flew it by,
Then on me gazed and strangely smiled,
But silence kept mysteriously ;
And when I bade him tell me why,
Long time my questions he beguiled,
Till for reward of promised songs
(Which thee too, Jove, have power to please)
He told me that to him belongs
(Gift of the god who rules the seas)
The power all speech to understand
Of every bird that cleaves the air,
Of every beast that haunts the land ;
And added, that he smiled to hear
What said the wild sea-bird of me.

He would not, dared not utter more,
For he was bound to secrecy
By oaths that most constraining be ;
And dreadful threats of vengeance sore
That gods inflict on perjury.

Since then, whene'er the feathered race
 Send their wild cries upon the breeze,
Or round my cliff-formed tower chase,
 Or inland chatter, in the trees ;
Whene'er the flocks, and herds, that graze
 On moor or mead, or seek their food
Far in the forest's leafy maze,
 Or haunt the rocky solitude,
When utter these their sound, or song,
 To me methinks relates their speech,
And aye to know their thought I long ;
 And this the boon that I beseech.

Nor does the gift I crave transcend
 The limit set by thee and fate ;
The power that azure Neptune lends,
 Much more canst thou, dread Potentate ;
'Neath whom all earth and heaven bends,
 Whose edicts gods and men await.

Nor do I doubt my prayer to gain,
 Established by the dreadful oath,
That must unchangeable remain,
 The pledge of undeceiving troth.

Fear not that I my promise break,
 Then Jove replied ; the word once past
My lips, nor force, nor chance can shake.
Thou, if thou wilt, the boon shalt take ;

But yet I warn thee at the last,
The power thou longest to possess,
Not all shall turn to happiness :
For many a pang thy heart shall feel,
And many a care thy rest defeat,
And all in vain thou shalt appeal
(This wish once granted) to repeat
Thy reckless joy. But 'tis not meet
The future further to reveal.

But if e'en now thy soul repent,
And if thou dread foreshadowed ill ;
—Not forfeit yet thy heart's content :—
Thy fate is in thy power still ;
To change the boon I still permit,
Still may you ask whate'er you will,
That maiden's breast with joy can fill,
So thy request be only fit,
By fate allowed.—He paused, but nought
Of fear or change the Siren thought,
But bent her head and naught replied.

Then smiling said the Sire divine—
Since thy resolves unchanged abide,
This do, and what you ask be thine.

Wait but to-morrow night, then soon
As comes the silent solemn hour

When in mid-heaven shines the moon,
And fate compels thee to thy tower.

Then as in front the waves are spread,
Thou shalt perceive within the cleft
That 'twixt the jagged rocks is left,
Beneath thy seat and on the left,
A slender plant, with bloom of red.
This must thou pluck from out the soil,
And root and scarlet bloom devour ;
And from the stalk a golden oil
Must press, and in thine ears shalt pour.

This done, thy wish is all possessed ;
For every cry and song of bird,
And voice and sound of every beast,
Shall be discerned as soon as heard.

For not to man alone, by heaven
(As mortals in their pride surmise)
The sacred power of speech is given ;
But to all creatures 'neath the skies,
When first from dust they were create,
I did the common power devise,
That they should all communicate,
Each with its kind, by varied cries :
And all their wants, their love, their hate,
And pleasure, pain, or fear relate.

This lore henceforward shalt thou know
But blither, happier, shalt not be.

I yet one other boon bestow,
To help the need that I foresee ;
Once, and but once, thou shalt be free
My gift to change within the year.
When such thy longing, call on me,
Nor harsh repulse nor anger fear ;
If lowly bent on suppliant knee.
And my wing-footed messenger
Shall speed, or I myself appear ;
And if to fate conformed, and meet
This last and lasting change, complete.

Meanwhile, to none this power disclose,
Nor dare reveal a thought or word,
Uttered by reptile, beast, or bird,
To dearest friends or hated foes ;
And to thy Sisters least of all.
For on your head would punishment
And vengeance terrible befall,
By the fell snake-haired furies sent.

And, Siren, now renew thy strain,
I deem with matchless sweetness fraught ;
Then haste and join thy Sisters twain,
And what has happened tell them nought :

Close in thy breast must all remain,
The sights and words this night has brought ;
Nor must be told to man or god
That Jove thine island home hath trod.

Nor shalt thou need excuse, or fraud,
Thy Sisters' questionings to ward,
Since by my deep designing they
Shall ne'er suspect thee of delay.

Ere each could leave her midnight tower,
I bade deep slumber seal her eyes ;
Nor do I yet remove the power,

Or let them from their trance arise :
Thus thou thy flood of song shalt pour
Into my well-pleased ear once more,
And ended my commands, shalt reach,
Long e'er thy Sisters twain, the beach.

XVI.

JOVE'S DECLARATION TO THE GODS

THUS spoke the sire of gods and men ;
And thus prepared the distant scheme
In his deep mind resolved ; and then,
Faster than thought or wingèd dream,
He reached Olympus' height again.

Then summoned all the race divine
Again around his throne to meet ;
Again he bade the banquet shine,
Ambrosial food and nectar sweet.

Then all the Olympian guests desire
To question how their monarch sped,
But by respect and awful dread
Restrained, none ventured to inquire,
Till thus began the blue-eyed maid,
Most loved and honoured by her sire.

Not yet (she said) almighty Jove,
Across the ocean's barren track
Thy trusted herald from above,
Wing-footed Hermes, has come back ;

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Whom thou didst send to Circe's den,
To bid her great Ulysses arm
(The wisest and the best of men)
Against the Siren's fatal charm.

But thou, from far remoter quest,
Hast long outstripped thy messenger ;
For who can strive or who compare
With thee, the greatest, wisest, best ?

And not for festival alone,
Dost summon now each heavenly guest ;
But or to make some project known,
By thee resolved, or some behest.—
Or thy late travel to declare ;
And if a Siren truly own
A voice as sweet, a form as fair,
As Hermes' wondrous tale has shown.

Nor these my words displeasing are :
For free thine awful brow from frown
Which weighs in gloom the heaven down ;
And beams consent thy gracious smile.

Her Sire approved her prudent guile,
And answered—Daughter, blue-eyed maid,
Pallas for strength and wisdom famed,
Thy speech and question all unblamed ;
Whate'er is fit shall be displayed.

Some secret shall I now reveal,
Somewhat command, and somewhat tell,
And somewhat time must still conceal.

Know then, the Siren's fatal spell
I will not should endure for aye ;
For on the suffering mortal race
Much have they wrought of misery,
By charmèd songs and lovely face.

Thus far I lift the future's veil :
But what the time, what means are fixed,
If years or ages stretch betwixt,
To find, e'en heavenly search shall fail :
This does unchanging doom decide,
Foreseen by me, and none beside.

And this attend, each heavenly power :
'Tis my resolved command meanwhile,
That none within the Siren's isle
Intrude, before the fated hour :
For none, not e'en the gods, can hear
Their raptured strain, and yet refuse
The boon to grant, whate'er they choose ;
Which with my plans should interfere.
None the heart's secret wish, save I,
Before 'tis uttered, can descry.

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Now cleaving fast the liquid air,
Comes the wing-footed herald god,
Who bears the sleep-compelling rod,
In time his tale confirmed to hear ;
For I myself have seen and heard,
And can attest, that Hermes brought
From that lone isle, with peril fraught,
That do the western billows gird,
No lover's dream, or wild report,
But did, with truth uncoloured, trace
The Siren's charm of voice and face.
For, Venus, though of grace divine,
Though love's, though beauty's queen you shine,
Yet is her form as fair as thine.

Though, Phœbus, thou o'er music reign,
Yet sweet, yet soft as thine, her strain.

Thus answered Jove's resistless might,
And all assented. And the gods
For many a joyous day and night
With feast and song their souls delight,
Then speed them to their own abodes.

XVII.

THE SIREN TRIES HER NEW POWER

THUS they.—Meanwhile the Siren maid
Not long beside her rock delayed ;
But soon as from her wondering sight
Vanished in air imperial Jove,
And sought the skies in viewless flight ;
All things she did, as her behove,
Nor aught forgot, or disobeyed.

Upon a courser fleet as wind,
She mounted, and her Sisters found
Still in the trance-like slumber bound,
In which the god their souls confined ;
And when she touched them and awoke,
(For Jove to break their swoon had bid
Gently to kiss each heavy lid)—
Much of their wondrous trance they spoke ;
Told how a drowsy love of rest
Stole on, that could not be repressed ;
But by Jove's secret power swayed,
Of her they nothing questionèd.

Then passed the night, and passed the day,
And night again the skies o'erspread :

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Then to her rock she sped her way,
All duties well remembered.

She marked the cleft, and found the flower,
Ate root and bloom, the stalk she seized
And in her palms the juices squeezed,
And hasted in her ears to pour.
Then strange confused sounds she hears,
And beats her heart and throbs her pulse,
And sudden thrills her limbs convulse :
Earth whirls, and fades and disappears.
Faint with dismay, on Jove she calls,
Then (just regained her rocky seat)
In slumber deep and long she falls.

Thus was the promised work complete.

And when she woke, at first all seemed,
The flower, the scene, the sound, the swoon,
As but a vision idly dreamed.—
But consciousness, returning soon,
Then memory point by point retraced—
All she had done, and felt, and seen ;
And in its just succession placed,
And proved that all had really been.

Anxious she waits till pass her by,
Some beast, or bird, with uttered cry :

That she in very truth may prove
(Though doubts she not) the gift of Jove.

Nor was the proof long time deferred ;
For quickly came the voices nigh
Of bleating sheep, and lowing herd,
Her courser's neighing, and the cry
And various songs of many a bird
That haunts the wood, or cleaves the sky,
Or skims the surface of the main :
And every cry, and sound, and song,
She found significant and plain,
As uttered in her native tongue.

Whatever else the Siren learns
Therefrom, 'tis needless to relate ;
For that alone our tale concerns,
Which wrought her change of heart and fate.

Now say we how this change befell.—
It was the Triton's words at first
(Who the wild sea-birds' cry could tell)
Which made her for the knowledge thirst
Of voices, which she deemed of late
Unmeaning, inarticulate.
But now she heeds, with anxious watch,
Some word about herself to catch.

Nor need she long her quest extend,
For many a bird she hears, and beast,
Speak of her, but in way she least
Expected, or can comprehend.
For still their meaning was the same—
Now told of pity, now of blame,
And spoke of some deficiency
Which in her state and life they see ;
And spoke of feelings long forgot,
Of pity, love, and tenderness,
Of heart-felt sorrow for distress,
Of grief and tears,—she knew not what.

And while herself she felt her life
Without a want, without a pang ;
A scene, with joy and pleasure rife ;
Strange in her ears their voices rang—
That nought she knew of happiness ;
And, doomed to bear a heart of stone
All life around her, they profess
Nobler, and happier than her own.

Thus at one time there floated by
An eagle, in her talons strong
Bearing a bleating kid along.—
And as she sought her nest on high,
And sped to feed her famished young,
Thus with surprise, and strange dismay,
The Siren heard her taunting cry :

'Tis true I raven for my prey,
By hunger urged and Jove's decree,
And thus no cruelty display ;
But, Siren, 'tis not so with thee,
Who, when no need nor profit move,
Canst find an aimless, useless joy,
Victims to torture and destroy.

I, too, my proper kind can love,
But thou, without a cause, dost hate
Those in thine own similitude,
Whom with like face and speech imbued,
The Olympian Sire did create.

E'en those that love, and in thy sight,
And from thy singing find delight,
Thou dost with fraud and death requite.

And if, compelled by vengeful fate,
Thus fierce and pitiless thou art,
I deem thy lot, and doomèd state,
Amid all creatures last and worst,
Fair Siren of the stony heart,
By all th' immortal gods accursed.

At other times, when on the shore,
Or on the waves she pleasure seeks,
As the wild ocean-birds sail o'er
And fill the startled air with shrieks ;

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Not now, unmeaning as before,
She hears them say, as round they wheel :
 Those are the Sirens, fair of form,
Who never ruth nor love can feel ;
 More fell than lightning, wind, or storm,
Whom doubtless as a punishment
For impious crime, in anger sent,
 The vengeful deities deprive
 Of what to all things else they give,
A heart that may to love be bent.

Then pelicans, perchance, flew near,
(That kindest of all creatures are),
And their own heart-drops scorn to spare
Their famished brood to feed and rear ;
And as around her head they sail,
She thus descries their mournful wail.

Poor Siren, thou shalt never know
 How sweeter, dearer than all joys
That in the selfish bosom flow,
Is happiness that we bestow,
 And pleasure of self-sacrifice :
I to my toils and cares depart,
 Which to thy ears 'twere vain to tell ;
Poor Siren of the stony heart,
 I pity and I bid farewell.

She heard the gentle dove, that sat
On rocky ledge, with purple wing,
Aye close beside her loving mate,
And each to other whispering :
No fairer form was ever seen,
No sweeter charms of face and voice,
Than has the Siren, well I ween ;
Graces and gifts of rarest choice.
Yet knows she nought of happiness.
All worthless every gift must prove,
And worthless all her loveliness,
Since she ne'er sorrowed for distress,
Nor feels the raptured bliss of love ;
Thou'rt wretched, whate'er else thou art,
Poor Siren of the stony heart.

She hears the birds around her sing :
We our sweet voice to heaven raise
In songs of love, and thanks, and praise ;
And joy, and mirth, and solace bring
To all who hear our minstrelsy.
Melodious Siren ! thou whose powers
Far sweeter, softer are than ours,
Dost use them only to destroy,
Thy song brings nought but misery ;
Thou must thyself most wretched be,
Who turn'st to death thy heavenly art,
Poor Siren of the stony heart !

The bleating folds, the lowing kine, -
In mountain and in meads that dwell,
She hears the same strange story tell :
We would not change our lot for thine ;
We care for, and protect our kind,
And live in love and friendship joined.
Thee do no claims of kin disarm,
O Siren ! by the gods bereft
Of pitying love, and heartless left ;
Who lovest but to wound and harm.

Still the same thought from day to day,
Where'er her anxious footsteps stray ;
On shore or sea, by wood or wold,
She hears each various creature say :
Both those that flee and those that prey,
And fierce and tame, and young and old ;
That any form they would prefer
Of life, to being like to her.

The ravening bird, the beast of prey,
Declare her fiercer far than they.
Victims, that they would rather die
Than have her heartless destiny.

E'en venom'd snakes, that glide her by,
Hiss to her from the tangled grass,
That she their malice doth surpass.

All pity her, or else despise,
Or blame she hears from every tongue,
Of beast that roams, and bird that flies,
Air, mountains, forests, plains, among.

That by the want of heart that feels,
She lives for ever, dispossessed
Of all most joyous, brightest, best
Among the gifts that fortune deals :
That whate'er else she may possess,
Life, beauty, power, youth, and song,
Marred by this fatal loss and wrong,
Nought knows she of real happiness.

XVIII.

THE SIREN WISHES TO CHANGE THE
GIFT.

AND thus it happened, that before
Twelve moons had round their centre flowed ;
In which Jove granted her the power
To change the gift he had bestowed ;
That much she longed to know, and feel,
What could that strange possession be,
Which all the forms of life reveal
As height of all felicity.

True, she herself no guilt could own,
Nor want, nor lack ; yet, all the same,
Compassion liked she not, nor blame ;
Nor brooked that to herself alone,
This bliss, this heart, should be unknown.

And long this thought possessed her mind,
And with desire strong and strange,
She more and more became inclined
To claim of Jove the promised change ;
And this of old the god designed,
His deep-laid projects to assist ;
And so by secret influence,

Aye made her longing more intense :
Till she no longer could resist,
And when the slow-revolving year
 (To which Jove's promise was restrained)
Was now about to disappear ;
 And but a few short hours remained ;

Then mystic rites all duly done,
 Which the Almighty Sire had taught,
Prostrate in prayer the earth upon,
 She thus the heavenly King besought.

XIX.

THE SIREN'S PRAYER.

GREAT Jove, o'er heaven and earth supreme,
Blame not my prayer as over-bold,
Nor let me rash and changeful seem ;
Nor thou thy suppliant thankless hold
For the rich boon bestowed of old,
If I entreat thee to resume
That former gift, and one bestow,
Which all thy creatures here below,
Whose speech thou gavest me to know,
Have made me long for—in its room.

From thine own gracious license flow
My prayer and courage ; for the night
Thy form first met my awe-struck sight,
Thou didst thy gift's result foreshow ;
And all my change of mind foresee ;
And didst pronounce, I should be free,
While passed a single circling year,
To show mine altered mind to thee,
Devoid of guilt, devoid of fear ;
And thou wouldst listen patiently,
And grant whate'er I chose to ask,

If such the gift as thou of yore,
On others hast been pleased to pour,
And fate prohibit not the task.

And the request that I desire,
Doth in these limits far remain ;
For it on man, and beast, and bird,
The wild, the tame, the vast, the small,
On reptiles e'en that glide and crawl,
On all thy creatures, heavenly Sire !
Save me, and save my Sisters twain,
Thou hast with bounteous hand conferred.

I ask whate'er the words imply
(For this as yet thy will conceals),
Yet, what each bird that cleaves the sky,
Each beast that treads the earth, reveals,
What tells each sound, and song, and cry,
That from all life around me steals,—
Is the best boon that from on high,
Thy bounty to creation deals ;
A heart that pities, loves, and feels ;
A heart, for such the words that oft
Fall on my ears (though well I ween,
I guess not, dream not what they mean),
Tender and loving, kind and soft.

Thus spoke the Siren, tuneful maid,
In deep devotion prostrate laid ;

Nor 'scaped she Jove's all-searching view ;
And her request, as soon as made,
Was to Olympus court conveyed ;
And all her mind the Thunderer knew.

Then swifter than the storm, or wind,
Or than the lightning's vivid path,
When hurled by Jove's avenging wrath,
That leaves the tired sight behind ;
Swifter than chariot of the sun,
Which round the sky, and sea, and land,
Guided by Phœbus' skilful hand,
Within a single day can run :
Swifter than all, save thought and prayer
(Which, by the heavenly Sire's decree,
Swiftest of all creation be,
And to his ever-open ear
The wants of wretched mortals bear),

So swift, across the barren plain
Of the far-sounding western flood,
Sped the Eternal Sire again,
And on the Sirens' island stood.

With pitying smile, and gracious look,
Above her drooping form he bent,
And by the hand the suppliant took,
And gently from the ground he raised,

And hope revived, and courage lent,
And calmed her mind with fear amazed,
And thus in kindly accents spoke :

Maiden ! I blame not your request,
For 'tis by my permission made ;
And you have duly done, and prayed,
All things enjoined by my behest ;
Nor have by word or look betrayed
The secret knowledge you possessed,
Not even to your Sisters twain,
Though oft by eager longing pressed
To seek their succour, to explain
Thoughts pondered long, but all in vain.

Then, too, the appointed time not yet
Expires until the sun be set ;
Nor is the boon by fate denied,
But spread through nature far and wide.

Your wish, then, you shall surely have,
If to demand it you persist ;
But e'er this final change you crave
Unto my sure prediction list.

Not even now, your life so glad,
So all unknown to anxious care,
As ere your present power you had,
And you but like your Sisters were.

And much of grief, and sorrow sore,
Will you escape, if you beseech
What still I place within your reach,
That I your former state restore.

Or if 'gainst this your mind be bent,
Though perchance best—then were it wise
With what you have to rest content ;
And blame and pity all despise,
Nor seek to fathom what is meant.

For know, if I this gift impart,
And change the stone within your breast
For a soft, pitying, loving heart—
Such as, unknowing, you request—
You bid farewell to joy and rest.

XX.

JOVE'S WARNING.

'TIS doomed by fate that you must sing,
And doomed by fate your song must bring
Ruin, and death, on all that hear ;
And when revenge this burden lay,

In pitying ruth, the self-same day
Your heart was senseless made, and sere,
That you might never feel nor know
Grief for the ills you cause perforce,
Nor rue the piercings of remorse ;
Nor pine in unavailing woe :
Woe without profit or release.
For day and night one hour still
You shall your fatal task fulfil ;
Which now, performed in mirth and peace,
Then shall despairing pangs instil.

Nor tell I if it e'er shall cease,
Nor yet I bid you quite despair :
For this must yet a secret be,
Known only to the Fates and me,
Submiss to my directing care.

Now all the ruin round you spread

Compels no tear, nor wrings a sigh ;
You see the dying and the dead,

And thousand shapes of misery,
And thousand sounds of wretchedness.

Yet nought that meets your ear or eye,
Can wound, or shock, or cause distress,

Or rouse the sleep, and apathy,
That now within your breast repress

All sense of pain, all sense of wrong ;
Nor hinder that in happiness

You and your Sister Sirens twain,
'Mid wreck and ruin can remain,

Delighting in your fatal song.

But for this change, if still you long,

If in your prayer you still persist,

And cannot in your mind conceive

Nor fear, nor think, nor credit yet

What means my warning and my threat ;

And how 'tis possible to grieve

For others—and in vain you list

To future doom before you set

(For none their destiny resist)—

Then, heedless Siren, you shall have

(Since passed the word, the oath pronounced

By gods ne'er broken or renounced)

The change you ask, the lot you brave.

Yes, you shall lose the heart of stone,
And in its stead shall live possessed
Of heart as gentle, soft, and kind,
As full of love and tenderness,
As ever sorrowed for distress,
As e'er by Nature was designed,
As ever glowed in pitying breast,
As e'er by gods or mortals known.

But soon as by this heavenly guest,
This loving, melting human heart,
Your bosom's threshold shall be crossed,
And it shall home and shelter find,
Never again to quit your mind,
Approved and loved and treasured most ;
Soon as this inmate, holy, blessed,
Shall make your soul its treasury,
Then shall those other guests depart,
That now within your bosom throng—
Laughter and mirth, and peace and joy,
The careless, jocund company,
That ruin, wrecks and death among,
Caused by your fatal fated song,
Can ever blithe and happy be ;
Without remorse or sense of wrong,
All these must, and must ever, flee.

Your song, henceforward as before,
Must charm one hour by night and day ;

Your song, henceforward as of yore,
Must trance and tangle and betray,
Must wreck, and ruin, lose, and slay,
Each wretch that falls within its sway.

But not henceforward, as of old,
With careless heart and happy cheer,
Shall you your fatal work behold,
But torn with anguish, shame, and fear.

Not in the future, as the past,
With raptured pleasure shall you hear
Your own delicious music cast
Its sweets o'er ocean far and near.
But every note shall wound your ear,
And you shall hate your late-loved song,
And feel its witching powers pierce
With pangs and horror deep and fierce,
The soft kind heart for which you long.

Ships heretofore upon your coast
Shattered, with all their fated crew,
You watched with joy, your song's true boast,
As captured prey, the victors view.
Of old, no pitying qualms you knew ;
The homes, the hopes, the lives all lost
By the poor wretches, tempest tost,
Whom your melodious poison slew,
No pang responsive ever cost,

No sympathetic tear-drops drew.
Such your old heart ; now learn the new.

Henceforth you ne'er shall see a wreck
(Though many a wreck your song shall make)
Lie rotting on your island shore,
But it your new-formed heart shall break,
And floods of bitter anguish pour ;
Yourself shall writhe with every cry,
With every death yourself shall die.

And such will be the agony
Of this divorce 'twixt will and fate,
Of the still strong necessity
To do what all the while you hate ;
Wounds to inflict, you long to heal,
And would yourself far rather feel ;
All good to wish, all harm to do,
Perforce to wring the tears of woe
From eyes you love, which make your own
With bitter scalding grief to flow,
To summon sighs, which as you hear,
Seem your own heart in twain to tear ;
Anguish unheard of, and unknown,
Shall so consume your life with grief,
That you shall supplicate for death :
To sleep the earth or waves beneath,
As the sole succour and relief,

From terrors that your soul appal.
Ask death with eager vehemence,
With longing, craving more intense
Than you can e'en imagine now.
Yet all unheeded shall you call
For gift your doom may not allow.

XXI.

ONE MORE PROMISE.

THEN tempt not rashly such a fate.
For your despair to mitigate,
Within my mercy's utmost range,
There will remain this choice alone :
To take again the heart of stone
Which never, never more shall change ;
And with your Sisters to abide,
And live with them and share the end
That shall their destinies attend,
Whate'er the doom that may betide.
Or else, your wretchedness to hide
In some far distant solitude ;
Some lonely isle, that wastes of tide
Immeasurable hence divide ;
Where shall your grief by none be viewed,
Nor sights of horror spread around,
On other eyes than yours intrude.
(For in the shelter newly found
Your fatal task must be renewed,
Your song-wrought wrecks must still abound.)
Yet shall not your despairing mood
By two-fold anguish be pursued,

Nor shall your tortured heart, intent
On sights of suffering, grief, and woe,
And by remorse, love, pity rent,
Feel the still bitterer, keener blow
Of striving vainly to bestow
On your loved Sister Sirens twain
(Since love for them shall still remain)
The pity they must never know ;

Of joining in their deadly strain,
And all the wrongs that from it flow.
Chained to the doom you hate and blame ;
Unlike to feel, yet do the same,
And see, through tears that seem aflame,
Their eyes with cruel pleasure glow ;
To hear the shouts of merriment,
In heedless, ruthless triumph sent,
Over the victims of your guile,
By those, for whom within your breast
Loathing and horror dwells ; the while
With love that cannot be repressed,
Your Sisters, who no change shall bear,
To whom all unimagined still
The feelings that your bosom fill.

Such lots your various fates declare.

Now, Siren, pause, bethink thee well,
And then your fixed decision tell.

XXII.

THE SIREN'S CHOICE.

THEN from her knees the maiden rose ;
Long time she paused, then said—Dread Sire
The words, the dangers, you disclose,
Increase, not lessen my desire :
An impulse that I strive in vain
Myself to fathom, or explain,
Such as I ne'er have felt before,
Makes me all future chance disdain,
This unknown region to explore :
This craving fills and rules my soul,
And brooks not reason or control.

And since you promise to restore
My heart to what it was before ;
And give me back my former days,
If I repent this heart to have ;—
Not much I risk, if still I crave
The gift that all thy creatures praise.

Her choice did thus the Siren make ;
For the strong cords of destiny
That all events control and tie,
None can resist and none can break.

XXIII.

THE FATES.

THEY sit upon their sacred hill,
Three Sisters : two prepare the thread
And mix the colours as they will ;
Now strings of gold, and now of lead,
Azure or sable, white or red :
These, wealth, ambition, happiness,
And thousand glorious gifts imply ;
Those ruin, want, and misery,
And ghastly forms of fell distress.

These threads so various they combine,
And as they will, together twine.

Thus fixed, or ere it be begun,
The course of every creature's life ;
And vain all struggle, prayer and strife,
To change the fate that once is spun.

And while the twain their task pursue,
And give each life its destined hue,
A third more awful form appears,
Dread Atropos, with ruthless shears,
And cuts the vital thread in two.

Where'er she severs, life must end ;
And none so wise or good or strong,
No prayers to all the listening skies,
No hetacombs of sacrifice,
The parted cord can knit or mend,
Or for an instant life prolong.

This measured thread, that thus controls
The fortunes of all living souls,
The fatal Sisters show to none
Of gods above, or men below,
But to almighty Jove alone,
To whom belongs all things to know.

To him revealed long since, was read
The story of the Sirens' thread ;
And ere he spake, he had foreseen
That her resolve could not be stayed,
Though from her sight withdrawn the screen,
And all the future were displayed ;
For warning ne'er could intervene
The fated and her fate between.

This known, the heavenly King essayed
No more the Siren to dissuade,
But this last word in pity said :—

When anguish wrings thy new-formed heart,
When spent thy powers, still to bear

Thy Sisters' mirth 'mid thy despair,
And thou art craving to depart
Far from all witness anywhere,

Then be thy vows to Neptune paid,
And the cerulean King shall aid :
And 'cross far-stretching wastes of tide,
To thine appointed home shall guide.

There, moored upon the yellow sand,
A single boat shall meet thy sight,
From which shall step upon the strand,
An aged Sibyl, sable dight.

Her with submissive prayer accost,
And ask her of thy destiny ;
Nor let a single word be lost
That 'scapes her raptured lips—for she
Doth the prophetic power boast,
And comes a messenger from me.

And now your wish, your doom receive,
And bear it with a mind as strong
As for it you did greatly long—
Nor quite despair, when hopes deceive.

XXIV.

THE FURIES.

THUS spake the Sire of gods and men ;
And thrice above the Siren then
His golden sceptre waved, and soon
The maiden sank in deepest swoon.

Then while in magic trance she lay,
From the Tartarean depths beneath,
From Pluto's realms of ghastly gloom,
From the black land of pain and death ;
He whom all things create obey,
Bade the fell snake-haired sisters come
Nor dare the Furies to delay.

And next he summoned from the skies,
Virtues, and prayers, and charities,
Who always stand around his throne,
With claspèd hands, and upraised eyes—
And each with ceaseless pity pleads
For wretched mortals' griefs, and needs ;
And every sigh and tear and groan,
Make to the heavenly Monarch known.
These, too, a lovely loving band,
Obey the heavenly King's command.

These present, last he bade appear,
The herald god, who bears the wand
Which ghosts and souls obey and fear ;
Whose wondrous power can constrain
Souls in their mansions to remain ;
Or when the thread is cut, compel
In Pluto's nether realms to dwell.

Then spake Heaven's despot—Hermes, thou
By thy Caduceus' power control,
Within her frame, the Siren's soul ;
Nor to desert its home allow,
Howe'er it strive. For well I trow,
That 'neath the Furies' icy touch,
And 'neath their ruthless glaring eye,
And at their deadly lips' approach,
Though in deep trance the maiden lie,
Without thy succour she must die.

Terror and anguish shall be such,
Her soul amazed shall seek to fly ;
And from her parted lips to rush.
Be thou with thy Caduceus nigh,
And back within her bosom push :
And sleep compel, and horror hush.

And then he bade the Furies lay
Their cold hands on the Siren's breast ;

And bade their mouth to hers be pressed,
And through her lips to suck away,
All loveless wrong, all poisoned harm,
All ills that did her heart infest,
And stain her spirit, from the day,
When she was changed by fatal charm.

Then the fell Sisters, one by one,
Did as the mighty Thunderer bade :
Upon her heart their hands they laid ;
Upon her mouth they fixed their own.

From 'twixt her lips they sucked her breath,
And from her panting bosom drew
Whate'er of evil lurked beneath.
And while each shuddering fibre quakes,
With threat'ning hiss and livid fold,
Entwine and mix the Furies' snakes,
Amid her locks of tangled gold.

And 'twas a dismal sight to view,
How near the maiden seemed to death,
While haunted by the vengeful crew.

From her soft cheeks, in horror sped
The blood, and all her colour fled ;
And down their frozen pallor coursed
From her wan brow drops large and cold,
By agonizing terror forced.

All ashy pale, from coral red,
Were turned her quivering, parted lips,
While theirs, to them, the Furies hold,
As milk the poisonous adder sips.
And as beneath their ruthless frown
(Made dark by gloom of serpent hair),
On hers, their deep gray orbs look down,
With numbing, unrelenting glare,
With penetrating freezing light,
That turns with sudden blasting fright
The palsied gazer into stone :
As these upon her face were thrown,
Her heavy lids wide open strained
(Although of sight or sense was none,
Nor aught of consciousness remained),
And with dilated wondering stare
Gazed up into those eyes of fear.

Her own, then shrinking 'neath the sway,
Appeared to die, to fade away,
Burnt out to darkness by dismay ;
Then closed again, and all had said,
So white, so cold, the maid was dead.

And many a time her spirit sought,
Amazed, o'erwearied, overwrought,
Its tortured tenement to flee ;
But Hermes, at his Sire's command,

Stood by her with restraining wand,
Nor let her form deserted be.

He held her still in charmèd sleep,
And gave her power to endure
The terrors that the Furies heap ;
And bore her through the fight secure.

Thus sped their task, the Sisters fell
The trancèd death-like Siren quit ;
And spread their broad, black wings, and flit
To Pluto's realms, of lowest hell.

THE SIREN CHANGED.

WHEN these Tartarean forms had left
 The Siren, as of life bereft,
 She lay, pale, cold, and motionless ;
 A marble statue, you had said,
 To represent some beauteous maid,
 Who died of terror and distress,

Whose face, e'en when the strife was o'er,
 Reveals the pangs she felt before ;
 So torture-worn the Siren's look
 When first their flight the Furies took.

Thus might a sculptured death retain
 The daughters fair of Niobe,
 When by the cruel envy slain
 Of the revengeful huntress Queen :
 Such Niobe herself might be,
 When her despairing eyes had seen
 The last of all her children ta'en,
 Then died herself of grief and pain.

Not long deserted thus she lay,
 For at the Olympian King's command,

Hastened the gracious kindly band,
Love, pity, prayer, and charity.

These too their charge, successive, tend,
That each her separate part may do ;
And each some lovely gift bestow,
Her heart to purify and mend.

Some kneel her prostrate form around,
Support her head, and succour lend ;
Some smooth the tresses all unbound,
That, as to 'scape the serpent brood,
Lay stretched in tangles on the ground,
Like seaweed borne upon the flood.
And as they stoop, and eager tend,
With hers their tresses mingled were ;
O how unlike that snaky hair,
Which made her locks all stand on end '

Now as they mix, there only seems
The confluence of two yellow streams ;
Or threads of different gold combined,
Of paler and of ruddier hue,
As in the Eastern mines we find,
Or those burnt Afric brings to view.

Then, one by one, their hands they laid
Upon the bosom of the maid,

That 'gan to soften and to melt,
As soon as was their pressure felt :
Then on her ashy lips they place,
With theirs, a clinging, long embrace ;
And breathe into her vacant heart
Each kindly gift they would impart.

Pity, and grief, for all distressed ;
 And gentle power of tears and sighs ;
 And love, and human sympathies :
All that is softest, sweetest, best.

And as their coral lips unite
With hers, so still and cold and white,
It brings to mind Pygmalion
Kissing to life the sculptured stone.
And although Hermes suffered not
 Her slumber wholly to awake,
Until, discharged of every spot,
 Her heart its perfect change should take ;

Yet the reviving power was such,
 Which through her death-like form they poured,
That 'neath their gentle kiss and touch
 The Siren quickly was restored :
Her cheeks their hue, their shape regain,
Distorted late and wan with pain ;
Her limbs that torture lately racks,
Her hands that clasped the ground—relax ;

Her lips their ruby dye put on ;
And marks of anguish all are gone.

And as with magic speed we see
Aspects of nature changèd be :
As summer suns that calmly sink,
Turn the gray clouds to gold and pink ;
As one by one the stars by night
Steal on the gazer's wondering sight ;
Or as thick clouds, that intervene
The eye and sun or moon between,
Grow thin and thinner by degrees
Till quite they fade, dissolve and cease,
And shines the orb with perfect light ;

As music that from distance steals,
Approaching nearer and more near,
Air, sense and harmony reveals
More and more clearly to the ear :

Thus, by their gentle, loving aid,
Changed and restored the Siren maid.

Nor only did their care restore
The Siren as she was before :
More now her grace, her beauty more—
For shows the beauty of the heart
Through form and face in every part.

Then, all their gracious task complete,
The heavenly Virtues homeward wend ;
And Jove commands his Herald fleet
(Soon as himself shall reascend)
To touch the Siren with his wand,
That can the deepest trance awake ;
And then his own far journey take.

Obedient to the King's command,
By Hermes all was duly done :

She woke—and found herself alone.

XXVI.

THE SIREN'S FEELINGS WHEN CHANGED

AND as she first awoke, her eyes
With eager glance she turned around
Towards land and sea, the cliffs, the ground ;
Then upwards to the air and skies,
To see if Jove might still be found,
That she before his knees might pour,
The earnest praise of gratitude :
For in her inmost being's core
By feelings new she understood,
By thoughts, hopes, fears not known before,
That wondrous soothing seemed, and sweet,
The boon was won, her change complete.

But of the way the change was wrought,
Of all that happened since the King
The tranced sleep did on her fling,
She nothing knew, and nothing thought.

Thus, finding that the god had fled,
In silence rose her thanks to heaven.
And while she thanked, no less she prayed,
That since he erst so much had given,
And been so pitiful and kind,

His power and mercy now would find
Some means, those evils to restrain
His warnings had foretold in vain.

In truth, at first her new-formed heart
With a mysterious pleasure glowed,
With a pervading happiness,
All words are useless to express :
And seemed as from all Nature flowed
A love it hastened to impart.

And happy thus long time she stood :—
(Nor memory spoilt her pensive mood) :
And let this sense of joy instil,
And all her mind, and spirit fill,
As sands suck in the trickling flood ;
As all things on a summer's day
Are warmed and cheered by Phœbus' ray.

But memory by degrees awoke ;
And through the joyful musing broke,
Whispering of all the warner spoke.

E'en thus in some gay banquet hall,
Made glorious for a festival ;
Decked out with gold, and colour bright,
And full of radiant lamps and light ;
With dance and feast and music glad,
And all of joyance may be had :

If chance a curtain to be drawn,
Or door or lattice open thrown,
Darkness and night a passage win ;
 And blasts from the cold outer storm,
That cloud, and chill the mirth within,
 And all the cheer and feast deform.

Or strikes the guest some dismal cry,
To mar and spoil the harmony :
Babbling of the forgotten world,
Late in joy's mantle hid and furled.

So did the flood of memory roll
 The words of warning Jove had said,
With some chill gloom upon her soul,
 In its first flush of joy arrayed.

And thus it followed that she prayed,
He would the threatened ill control.

XXVII.

THE SIREN'S EXPERIENCE OF HER
NEW STATE.

AND then, against a bank reclined,
These sad, intrusive thoughts of fear
Were wholly banished from her mind ;
To present peace and joy confined.

When sudden struck upon her ear
(As gazed she listless o'er the plain),
The cry as of a thing in pain.
The sound made all her pulses beat
With a new-felt, unwonted grief :
And quick she started from her seat,
And hastened to afford relief.

It was but of a bird, whose nest
Glided a serpent to infest ;
And the poor helpless mother, made,
By loving instinct, brave and strong,
Did with its feeble beak invade,
And threat'ning wing and piercing cry,
The foe that slid the brakes among.

Close to the snake it fluttered by,
Bold its own danger to defy,
To save from death its callow young.

The Siren drove the snake away,
Far distant from its destined prey :
Restored the mother to her brood.

And if she still had understood,
The language of all things below,
She would have heard the lark bestow
Of praise, and thanks, a tuneful flood,
On her who rescued from the foe.

She kissed and coaxed the pretty bird,
Which never fled her hand or feared ;
And then she turned her to the shore :
But in her heart some trouble stirred,
She was not joyous as before :
For much she conned how dread 'twould be
To witness human misery.

And next the recollection came
Which stung her heart like dart of flame ;
The shameful agonizing thought,
Not since her change before her brought,
That she herself is doomed to bring
Ruin on all who hear her sing.

She tried to cast the thought away,
As a portentous, hideous dream ;
A nightmare vision of dismay
That could not be, but only seem.

And almost was she thus resolved,
Almost her former calm regained,
When all delusion was dissolved,
And each fond hope she half had feigned
To her own heart, and half had felt,
Was doomed in black despair to melt :
Clear all the dreadful truth remained ;
And thus it was her doubts were solved.

She cast her eyes upon the shore,
Which many a wreck was scattered o'er ;
The yellow sands she gazed upon,
Hideous with many a scattered bone.

She saw, she comprehended all !
And shrieked with agony replete :
'Tis my own deeds my heart appal,
The frightful deeds I must repeat.

Then whelmed with horror, shame, and dread,
She shuddered, clasped her hands, and fled.

She fled, poor wretch ; but where, and why ?
She cannot flee from destiny.

She speeds and to her Sisters calls ;
Upon their necks in tears she falls ;
And tells them all her misery.

But then she found her wretchedness
Rise to a bitterer, worse excess ;
Her sisters cannot sympathize :
They can no help, no pity lend,
They cannot even comprehend
What is it wrings her tears and sighs.

Their hearts forever hard by doom.
As rocks, and changeless as the tomb.

And then they sought her grief to cheer,
By telling how their singing sped,
And bid her mark some vessel near.

In short, all ills that Jove had said
Would rage like storms around her head,
Now rose before her, stark and clear.

Then on the Sisters twain she fixed
Looks, where love, pity, horror, mixed ;
And fled once more, at least to hide
Her anguish, and alone abide.

Nor always could she even gain
This mitigation of her pain ;

For oft her Sisters would intrude
Upon her mournful solitude—

Not that to grieve, they think or will
 (For whilst forbid by fate and Jove
 All other living things to love,
They loved at least each other still);

But that they longed to see if passed
 What they some strange delusion deem,
 Some magic spell, some frantic dream,
Upon their Sister's spirit cast ;

But that they hope to find once more
The happy comrade of before.

And then, ne'er thinking of the blow
 Their words would deal, they 'gan to praise,
 As far beyond their own, her lays,
Which ever sweet and sweeter grow.
And well, alas ! she felt and knew
The wrecks that round her tower strew,
Proved all their poisoned praises true.

XXVIII.

THE SIREN AND THE SIBYL.

THEN thought she—Were it not well done
To revel like my Sisters, free ;
To take again the heart of stone,
And never more to sigh and groan ?

But no, she said, it may not be :
Better endure all agony,
Than ever to delight again
In deeds of wrong, and sights of pain.

Heaven's mighty King, to thee I turn,
Grant me ('tis all I wish) to die ;
But if my prayers for death you spurn,
Then to the Ocean King I turn,
To lend his succour hence to fly.

Scarce said the word, the prayer scarce o'er,
When, harnessed to four ocean steeds,
A chariot floated to the shore.
To this the wretched Siren speeds,
And left the isle for evermore.

For miles on miles, and wastes on wastes,
Over the watery desert wide,

With frantic speed the chariot hastes :
Its course the azure King doth guide.

And nothing did her flight betide,
That need we in our tale relate,
Save that each hour, early, late,
Vast flocks of birds keep by her side,
And fishy shoals upon her wait,
And all her course accompanied.

Six days, six nights, without delay,
Thus sped she ever on and on ;
But when the seventh morning shone,
Her rapid steeds their travel stay,
For they had reached the crescent bay,
Where first began the Siren's lay.

Then leapt she eager to the strand :
And thousand thanks and prayers she poured
To Neptune, earth-convulsing lord,
All prostrate, kneeling on the sand.

Then soon as from her knees she rose,
The Sibyl, sable dight, she knows,
Whom she must greet by Jove's command.

Before the Seer she bent her low,
And thus took courage to address :

To thee, inspirèd Prophetess,
Who canst alone some hope bestow,
By mighty Jove's behest I fly,
To tell me of my destiny,

And give me help to my distress.

Though see I nought of help, unless
Thine art can tell me how to die.

But if this solace fate deny,

Then other cure there seemeth none,

Save to resume the heart of stone—

And this I cannot think upon.

To whom the Sibyl—Ponder well,

And ne'er forget what I foretell.

First, wretched Siren, would you speed,

Then never falter nor decline,

Whate'er your sorrow, pain, or need,

From this last-named resolve of thine :

For e'en this fountain of your grief

Shall prove the source of sure relief.

Then do not of your fate despair,

For 'tis not Orcus—gloomy king !—

Cessation of your woes shall bring :

This will the great Olympian care,

If to your oath you faithful prove.

But what the time that shall control

Your fate, lies hid within the soul—

The deep, revolving soul of Jove,
Who can undo, if such his will,
All that you do and bear of ill.
Then with your burden bravely cope,
And though no hope appear, still hope.

And now, to be thy constant stay
All the sad hours thou doomèd art,
I for a moment will impart,
To see the beach, the shore, the bay,
As they shall be some future day ;
And, maid, believe, however strange,
Your eyes, yourself shall see the change.

Now let your gaze around you range.

She said, and touched the Siren's eyes,
Then bid her look toward the sea.
And from its depths she saw arise
What planks and masts and wrecks might be.
And in an instant reunite,
And show trim vessels to the sight,
Each clamorous with a gallant crew.

Then straight the wondrous scene withdrew.

Next toward the shore the maid she turned,
Who there a growing town discerned :
Temples, and theatres, and docks,

Palace and court of ample space,
And girding walls and forts, replace
The silent, vacant beach and rocks :
A queen the works presided o'er,
Whose form she recognised her own

This vision, too, was passed and gone.—
Barren, unpeopled as before,
She looks around on sea and shore,
And with the Sibyl stands alone.

This scene, revealed for your support
(Thus did her speech the Prophet end),
Through days however long or short
Your baneful future shall extend,
.Doth Jove's supreme compassion send.

And morn and even let your prayer
To the almighty King ascend ;
And to the god who cleaves the air—
Hermes, your advocate and friend.

Then sought the Prophetess her boat.—
And cross the harbour, o'er the spray
Of the sunk rock that closed the bay,
With lightning speed she 'gan to float,
And from the Siren's ken was borne,
Beyond the cliff's projecting horn.

XXIX.

JOVE'S DECISION CONCERNING THE
SIREN.

AND now long time the Siren dwelt
Upon that solitary isle—

But how she grieved and mourned the while,
And how she wept, and prayed, and felt ;
How wreck and death her singing dealt ;

How death, and love, her face and smile,
On all who hear her or behold ;
All this has long ago been told.

But now our task is to relate

How once again the gods above
In great Olympian conclave sat,

Around the throne of highest Jove :
Summoned to hear the monarch state,
The counsels now resolved by fate.

But ere himself his will defined,

He bade th' assembled deities
Declare whatever project lies,
Or wish, or scheme, within their mind :
To punish, or reward mankind.

Then Pallas spoke, the blue-eyed maid ;—
And, Sire and King, the goddess said,
'Tis now the time long since was named,
 In which Laertes' mighty son,
For patience and for wisdom famed,
 His wandering o'er, his labours done,
Was destined (such thy word) to come
To his loved wife, and island home.

Yet Circe, wondrous sorceress,
 By mystic verse, and magic spells,
 The hero and his crew compels,
In her charmed grotto's soft recess,
With her to live in idleness.

Jove, shall she thus thy will oppose ?

Next Hermes, wingèd Herald, rose,
And said : Long since, Almighty Sire,
 Thou bad'st the Siren not despair :
That her long trial should expire,
 If she was strong in love and prayer.
See what long days she doth endure
 Anguish and sorrow, sighs and tears,
Nor will accept thy proffered cure ;
 Since woe to evil she prefers,
Is not her time of torture spent ?
Will not the envious powers relent ?

Then the dread King stretched forth the hand
That doth all heaven and earth command.
And forward all the council leant,
 And with an awful silence wait,
Upon the monarch's words intent,
 What he shall add to their debate ;
 For well they knew his word was fate.

Then spoke the Thunderer : Pallas, ne'er
For thy much-favoured hero fear.
And, wingèd Hermes, deem thou not
The Siren's wretched doom forgot.

Wisdom, and zeal, your prayers prevail :
 This, and much more, shall all be done,
 E'er rise and sink the seventh sun.
Watch whilst I lift the future's veil.

My Herald son, the charge be thine
 Circe to bid no more delay
The great Ulysses to resign,
 And forward on his destined way,
Soon as the morrow's sun shall shine.
And bid her well the hero teach,
 How, sailing 'cross the trackless main,
 Striving the rocky heights to gain
 Of his loved native Ithaca,
Unscathed he may endure the strain,

And saïl beside the Sirens' beach,
Which he, upon the seventh day,
And comrades of his toil, shall reach.

What change or death shall then betide
The stony-hearted Sisters twain,
When first they find their art is vain,
This let the azure King decide,
Who rules the wastes of water wide.

But this, whate'er their fate may be
(Left to the ocean god's decree),
Is fixed by changeless doom and me,
That never from the seventh morn,
The voices of the Sirens three
Shall to the death-charmed ears be borne,
Of those who travel o'er the sea.

And, further, on the self-same day,
Shall Hermes seek the maid forlorn,
Who in sad solitude doth stay,
Pining her bitter life away,
Her heart by pitying anguish torn.

And with persuasive guile shall try,
If still she keeps her constancy :
Shall tempt her sorrow to discard,
The woes her softened heart has brought,
And make it once again grow hard,
And love, and reck, and pity nought.

If there he fail, he next shall prove,
If others more than self she love ;
If she prefer herself to die,
 Victims from death and doom to save,
And she herself consent to lie
 Mangled, and crushed, beneath the wave.

If victor in these trials sore,
Then past her woes for evermore :
And she so tender, firm, and true,
 The destined ages shall survive,
 With all the goods the gods can give.

And for reward I grant her, too,
The lives restored of every crew
She thought her magic music slew :
But changed by me to fish and bird,
That round her island-dwelling herd ;
These shall her willing subjects be ;
Their loved and loving monarch she.

XXX.

ULYSSES.

THUS, all declared, the Thunderer's
will.—

(Which sped his Herald to fulfil :
Since did that awful might insist,
That gods nor mortals dare resist.)

Soon as the golden morrow shone,
The great Ulysses was dismissed,
Laertes' wise, far-wandering son ;
Though much the sorceress grieved to lose
The hero whom she vainly chose
To share her life and love and throne.

He left with all his crew, save one,
Who, dark with wine, upon the night
Before his chief's and comrades' flight,
Fell from the ladder's slippery height,
And died, his woeful hap unknown.

Well then did Circe store his bark
With skins of wine, and needful food,
And costly presents rare and good.

And did she well and clearly mark
His path across the briny waste ;
But chiefly with repeated care
(Since such the Thunderer's strict behest),
She taught him safely how to dare
The Sirens' fated isle to near,
And their delirious song to hear ;
Which none before had ever passed.

Thus taught, with strong, untiring stroke
The heroes ⁴⁰⁷⁻⁴⁸clave the watery ways,
Six nights and six successive days ;
But when the seventh morning broke,

Far o'er the waste of ocean wide,
A little speck upon the sea,
No larger than the fruit might be
Which bears the storm-despising oak,
O'er the far water's edge he spied.
And this no sooner he descried,
Than by the teaching clear and true
Which Circe gave, his course to guide,
The Sirens' magic isle he knew.

Then straight he bade his eager crew
E'er yet their vessel nearer drew,
Or able yet to hear or view,
A fire upon the deck to make,

And from the vessel's hollow side
A cask, fair Circe's gift, to take,
Which wax prepared by magic skill,
And herbs of wondrous virtue, fill ;
Able, with deaf'ning bar, to close
The ear, and every sound oppose.

This speeds the wary chief to melt,
And portions to each comrade dealt.

But first, while yet they hear, he bade
(And while himself retains control
Over the purpose of his soul,
Nor yet the maddening songs invade)
To bind him to the planks and mast,
With threefold cords, and iron chain,
Arms, legs, and chest in bonds to strain ;
With hands and knees to clench him fast ;
Nor gestures heed, of rage and pain,
Till many a lengthened league of tide
Far from the Sirens' isle divide.

Thus to coerce, however loath,
He bound them by constraining oath,
So fate alone to him might give
To hear the Sirens and to live.

All as the crafty hero bade
Was done : himself so firmly bound,

Useless had e'en Alcides found
 His strength, in such a fetter laid ;
 The crew, of hearing so bereft
 They nought had heard tho' thunders sped
 In pealing bursts about their head,
 And crashed the storm to right and left.

Well was it that they not delayed—

For scarce 'twas safe, when gently stole
 The music on Ulysses' soul ;
 And then well proved the charm how strong,
 That maddened in the Sirens' song :
 For he whose constant heart withstood
 Fair Circe's spells, and magic art ;
 And could from bright Calypso part,
 The loveliest daughter of the flood ;
 Could with the goddess share her cell,
 And e'en was steadfast to defy
 The bribe of immortality ;
 Nor from his purpose swerved or fell ;
 Now found the Sirens' poisoned strain
 Unhinge and sway his balanced brain :
 Made a base captive of his will,
 Enslaved to that melodious ill ;
 And though to yield he could foresee,
 Would shame, and death, and ruin be,
 Yet strove he to resist in vain :

THE SIREN

His fame, home, wife, son, country, seem
An undesirèd, loveless dream ;
For nought he cares, for nought can long,
But only for the Sirens' song.

He strove to burst his chains away ;
 He bade the crew his fetters break.
 They hear not, nor their oath forsake ;
His former wisdom, all obey.
None heed his signs of rage and pain,
 Gestures of prayer, or frantic threat ;
Struggles, the vessel's side to gain,
 Or seize the helm, are only met
By stronger efforts to retain,
By bonds, and chains, more tight and fast,
Till was the tuneful danger past,
By leagues of intervening main.

FATE OF THE TWO SISTER SIRENS.

MEANWHILE the tuneful Sisters both
 Upon the rock together sat ;
 For since their Sister fled, they loath
 Had ever been to separate.
 One did her lovely arm entwine
 Around her Sister's slender waist ;
 With hers, the other kindly pressed
 Her Sister's neck, of snowy shine :
 Or let it on her shoulder rest,
 Coaxing her locks of golden hair ;
 Their other hands each other hold,
 And on one Sister's lap were placed ;
 And thus so lovingly embraced,
 Their tresses mingling, they were fair
 As sweetest vision painter e'er
 Conceived, or poet's story told.

Thus sat these Sisters side by side,
 And watched the waste of ocean wide ;
 And then their voices they unite,
 In softest, most melodious song ;
 Strange harmonies made doubly sweet ;
 And thus Ulysses' bark they greet,

With looks of triumph and delight,
As hove it first far off in sight ;
Then to their island sped along
(So thought they), certain wreck to meet.

Now near the coast the vessel drew,
And swept beside their rocky seat,
And passed so close beneath their feet,
The rower's form and face they view ;
Yet on his oar each rower bends,
And looks with steadfast eyes before,
Nor ever turns them to the shore,
Nor to their charmèd song attends ;
But with a calm and even stroke
(Naught but the steerer's signal broke),
Unchecked, unchanged, they carry on
Their course, as though they sailed alone,

And naught could see, and nothing hear,
To make them wonder, joy, or fear,
Or from their toil a moment stay ;
So came they, passed, and then were gone
In ocean's distance far away.

The Sirens sang their sweetest, best,
That wondrous vessel to arrest ;
Which, unregarding, passed their coasts,
As peopled not by men, but ghosts :

And much they marvelled, that the crew
Should thus, unharmed, their course pursue ;
 And long upon the ship they gazed,
And then their melody renew,
Which ever sweeter, sadder grew,
 As by the waves 'twas sunk and raised.

But when, despairing and amazed,
Beyond their utmost sight at last,
They found the vessel safely past ;
 Then whether by the Furies crazed
At Jove's command, whose purpose still
All things unconsciously fulfil ;
Or torn with grief and passion tossed,
Deeming their tuneful powers lost,
And magic songs despised ; or if
 Only too far in gazing bent,
 Beyond the slippery steep they leant,
And so fell o'er the dizzy cliff.

Which truth may be, we cannot tell ;
But thus at least the hap befell,
That, hand in hand, the Sisters stood,
Perched on the steeps that washed the flood ;
And gazed into each other's eyes
With tears of anguish and surprise ;
And once each other's lips they pressed,
Once clasped each other to their breast ;

And then together fell or leapt
From the rock's summit to the sea
(Seeming like two white birds to be),
And far beneath the wave were swept ;

But not to death—for ocean's King
Deemed their sad fortune undeserved ;
He knew they had been doomed to sing,
And not from right by malice swerved.
Soon, then, as dashed they to the wave
He bid th' obedient billow save,
And safely to his palace bring.

And then to ocean nymphs he changed,
And gave them gentle hearts and good.
And thus they lived, from ill estranged,
Their happy days beneath the flood ;
And hand in hand the Sisters strayed
Through the sea meads or coral glade,
And they sang sweetly as before :
But their loved voices ne'er again
Caused wreck or ruin, grief or pain,
But mirth and pleasure evermore.

XXXII.

THE SIREN'S TRIAL AND REWARD.

MEANWHILE, upon the self-same day
When the two Sisters were relieved
From curse and doom and vengeful sway,
And by great Neptune's clemency
Amid his favoured train received,

To the third Sister Hermes went,
To do the Thunderer's will intent.

He found the Maiden by her seat,
Her hated penance just complete :
Prostrate upon the rock she lay,
Shedding fast tears of bitter grief,
Because she saw upon the reef
That closed unseen the treacherous bay,
A vessel trammelled by her art ;
And soon its planks must burst in twain,
And soon within the hungry main
Must perish many a gallant heart.

With anguished cry she prayed to Jove,
With tight-clasped hands and streaming eyes,

THE SIREN

And breast convulsed with sobs and sighs
That he, and all the powers above,
Would free her from her hated doom,
Or else in mercy yield a tomb.

And O ! (she cried) in pity save
Those, my song's victims, from the grave.

Then Hermes neared the wretched maid,
And in persuasive accents said—

Why longer, O disconsolate,

Strive with inexorable doom ?

Why longer pine and waste and wait

For the relief that ne'er may come ?

Perchance the hope on which you lean,

Not rightly heard or understood ;

Or may long ages intervene

Ere made the fancied promise good :

Perhaps for lengthened ages still

Destined your song to scatter ill,

Your grief, your pity cannot cure :

Why longer useless pains endure ?

The wretches whom your strains destroy

Fall not by you, but destiny :

Your joy would not their pangs increase ;

Your suffering gives them not release.

None could your choice reprove or blame
If Jove's still offered gift you claim,

And 'scape the feeling and the pain,
Of wrongs you deprecate in vain.

Leave then this prison, sad and lone,
Leave uselessly to weep and groan ;
Take once again the heart of stone,
Join your loved Sisters, as of yore,
In peace and pleasure evermore.

But the poor Siren thus replied :
I must not, cannot so decide ;
If this the sole release you show,
Still must I bear my weight of woe ;

For never can I make the choice
In others' suffering to rejoice ;
Never 'mid wrongs can I consent
To live in heartless merriment :
Rather than this in torture wait
The end, howe'er delayed by fate.

The Herald of the gods replied :
Firm is your soul so sorely tried ;
Yet bring I one word else from Jove,
A message shall your courage prove.

Oft do you supplicate to die.—

 This last sad choice you may command

If still the dreadful purpose stand :
But, maiden, pause e'er you comply ;
Dread the gaunt spectre, seen when nigh.

Yet would you give your life to save
Yon wretches struggling in the wave ?
This fate permits. Behold your death
Upon the pointed rocks beneath.

She eyed the chasm at her feet ;
On the sharp crags she fixed her look,
And all the blood her cheeks forsook,
Yet did not from her love retreat.

Slowly she turned, and with low voice,
But firm, she answered : Hermes, swear
By heaven's dread oath the crew to spare,
And made, and shall be kept my choice.

He swore ; she sprang into the air,
And down the cliff herself she threw.
But wingèd Hermes faster flew,
And seized and saved the Siren fair ;
And with her to the beach he sped,
All pale and wan, and seeming dead.

But such the power of gods on high,
He straight restored the heroic maid

To life and bloom, and calm and joy,
And then with gracious accent said :
Siren, thy trials all are o'er !
Jove crowns thy love with recompense
Which from this hour shall commence,
And make thee blessed for evermore.

Not those alone, who caused thy grief,
Late wrecked upon the sunken reef,
Does the creating hand restore :
But all thy singing slew erewhile,
Or here, or in thy Sisters' isle,
Or in the sea, or on the shore,
Erst changed by Jove to fish or bird,
Restored, thy subjects are conferred ;
All that the Sibyl darkly showed
Is by th' eternal king bestowed.

And now, to make thy joy complete,
Thy Sisters, all their trial done,
Their former gentle nature won,
Are living in the azure main,
A part of Neptune's chosen train ;
They too some day thine eyes shall greet.

Now turn and look—And at his word
The Sibyl's vision reappeared :
But no mere phantom met the view ;
All now was certain, real, and true.

The reef was gone, and on the bay,
Well manned, a gallant navy lay ;
And countless crowds upon the beach,
The Siren for their Queen beseech.
And soon a glorious state they build,
With wealth and peace and power filled.

Thus o'er a mighty realm she reigned,
And aye her subjects' hearts retained :
For to requite her own, did Jove
Secure her in her people's love.

And once in each successive year
Two lovely maidens would appear ;
Loved guests of the still lovelier Queen
(So fair a three were never seen) ;
And when their tuneful voices join,
They made a music so divine,
It made all nature laugh, and bloom,
It made the sick their health resume,
Made grief and carking care to fly,
And hatred changed to amity.

And thus are sung, in simple strain,
The Siren and her Sisters twain.

THE END.

